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JUNE

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Fantastic

25c **NOVELS** MAGAZINE

Vol. 5 JUNE, 1951 No. 1

Novelettes

SPAWN OF THE COMET.....**Otis Adelbert Kline** 16
Silently, without warning they came, those fishermen of deep space who spread their net for man—living flying saucers the Earth must destroy—yet who multiplied by dying!
Copyright 1930 by Popular Publications, Inc.

THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM..**Ray Cummings** 40
Lovely beyond all dreaming was she—and unobtainable as the farthest sun, unless he could bridge the terrible chasm between his universe and hers—which he held in the palm of his hand.
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Stories

THE SONG OF THE SIRENS....**Edward Lucas White** 72
Woe to the hapless sailor man who stumbles on the Sirens' rock!
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THE SHADOWY THIRD.....**Ellen Glasgow** 88
Nothing on earth was forgotten in his web of hate—but, something of heaven was. . . .
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WAR GOD'S GAMBLE.....**Harry Walton** 94
He had to take a mad gamble with destiny, with the world in the balance!
Copyright 1942 by Fictioneers, Inc., a subsidiary of Popular Publications, Inc.

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Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Fantastic Novels, New Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Dear Readers:

A recent editorial letter of mine has brought questions from some of the readers of *Fantastic Novels*. I had said we were going to have a few classics from *Astonishing* and *Super Science* and some from outside sources such as books and other magazines than our own. This seems to have created the impression that we are not going to run the Munsey stories. This is not true. We plan to continue the long Munsey novels and the novelettes and short stories from the old *Argosy* and *All-Story*. An occasional fine tale from elsewhere, such as you have had in few recent issues, is the only difference that is planned. So far, the majority of the readers have been well pleased with such offerings as "Mimic" and "The Cross of Mercrux", which did not displace the Munsey classics.

The present publishing of "The Girl in the Golden Atom" is a response to the many readers who have come to us since it was published in the first issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, a long time ago. "Spawn of the Comet" by Otis Adelbert Kline, in this issue, is one of the most requested of the Munsey classics, and rightly famous.

"The Snake Mother" by A. Merritt, which was scheduled for the April issue originally, will appear in a later issue. The change of date on the cover—April instead of March—is purely a technical change for newsstand purposes, and does not indicate any change in the frequency of the magazine. There will still be six issues a year.

Yours in Fantasy,
Mary Gnaedinger, *Editor*.

"ONE OF OUR BEST"

It looks as though *Fantastic Novels* has hit the jackpot again. Meaning the Jan. ish, natch. For a while I thought F.N. was going to slip into one of its few ruts, but your two latest issues changed my mind. The two best, and most recent novels of 1950, were: "Earth's Last Citadel," followed by "The Hothouse World."

The lead novel for the Jan. ish was one of your best. In my opinion, Zagat wrote far too little fantasy. Though I couldn't ask for more than Zagat's fine story, I got it. I mean the fine illo accompaying the lead novel. One of Finlay's finest.

Lovecraft's "Cats of Ulthar" was mildly entertaining, though after Zagat's masterpiece, it was anticlimactic. Bok's illo for it was up to his usual high standard.

"The Last War" by Coblentz was a fine piece of poetry. I don't usually go for poetry, but this just appealed to me.

The cover by DeSoto was good, but Lawrence is the man to see about covers. The art work as a whole was fine.

Before I leave F.N.'s hallowed pages, I will make a request: Anyone with back issues of stf. and fantasy mags who want to trade them for excellent stamps, please contact me. I would also like to have some correspondence with some of you fen who read everything you can lay your hands on, but never enter into fandom.

Jan Romanoff.

26601 So. Western,
Apt. #341,
Lomita, Calif.

LIKED COBLENTZ'S VERSE

I enjoyed "Drink We Deep" very much. I had read part of it in the *Argosy*, so was glad to get the rest. I wish you would print "Seven Out of Time" by the same author. I have to complain about the cover, though. What are those strange green creatures? According to the story, the little men were like us, only smaller and not green horrors. I wish Finlay could do the covers.

I was sure surprised when I saw the new F.F.M. I like its new form very much.

I enjoyed the poem by Coblentz. I wish we could have more poetry. I wonder how many liked "The Cats of Ulthar". Lovecraft stories are fascinating but not likeable. I always read them, but they leave me with a feeling of horror. I liked "The Shadow Out of Time" the best of his works.

P. H. Malone.

3502 Union St.,
Eureka, Calif.

(Continued on page 8)

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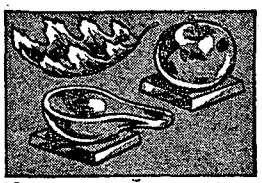

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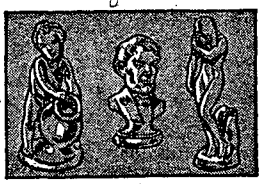

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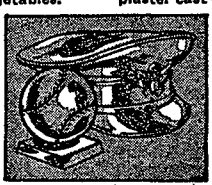

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(Continued from page 6)

IMPORTANT NOTICE

We would like to inform the readers of your magazine that The Fantasy Veterans' Association is sponsoring a one-day gathering of science-fiction fans, to be held in New York in April or May.

Features of "Fan-Vet Day" will be the showing of one, possibly two, fantasy movies, and a giant auction of science-fictionalia, including art work from this magazine.

Exact date and place of the meeting are yet to be decided. Any reader who is interested in receiving further information when it becomes available may obtain same by writing to Ray Van Houten, Secretary, Fan-Vets, 127 Spring St., Paterson 3, N. J.

Ray Van Houten,
Secretary.

The Fantasy Veterans Association
Office of the Secretary,
127 Spring St.,
Paterson 3, N. J.

ABOUT MUNSEY CLASSICS

I note in "What Do You Think?" that you are going to feature new short stories and novelettes and also carefully selected classics from outside sources such as books and magazines, and that this is a departure which you believe will please the readers. Does this mean no more "Munsey Classics"? A classic from other magazines would be o.k. once in a while, but why the books? You now have a magazine, F.F.M., which does this (six a year). Why do it in F.N.? There certainly are a number of good stories still left in the Munsey files. I know it! Because I took *Argosy* from 1923 up to about a year before Popular Publications took it over.

Sincerely,
Earl J. W. Forster.

2546 N. 17th St.,
Milwaukee 6,
Wis.

Editor's Note: As I have said in my letter at the beginning of this department, the Munsey classics will not be neglected in F.N.

BACK ISSUES FOR SALE

I don't have many F.N.s or F.F.M.s left for sale. They were nearly all ordered first by two of my first inquirers after you published my letter. I do have the Dec. '48, Oct. '49, Feb. '50 and Jan. '51 F.F.M. I also have the Dec. '49, Feb. '50, and Apr. '50 A.M.F. I am tempted to hold onto the latter unless I get offered a real good price for them. I have "The Return of Fu Manchu" and "Brood of the Witch-Queen" by Sax Rohmer, in hard covers. Also will sell a number of mags from '46 on.

Thanks for the glorious moments of pleasure you've instilled in your grand magazines. They each seem to have a personality all of its own, and you certainly have made F.F.M. and F.N. two of the most famous fantastic magazines in the world.

Glen Wright.

938 Humboldt Parkway,
Buffalo 11,
N. Y.

NEW FAN CLUB

I would greatly appreciate it if you would publish this letter.

We're trying to form a stf. fan club here in Springfield. The only requirement is that you have a genuine interest in stf. or fantasy. Age or sex is no barrier. All those interested get in touch with me.

Members of our club can get a 25% discount on new stf. books.

Our first meeting was Nov. 28th. Six fen were there. The ages were very varied and so, no doubt, someone in your age group was present. We've lined up some other fen who aren't sure they wish to form a club, but might wish to.

In a city of 150,000 there should be a fan club. Come on now, don't be behind the times!

Charles Baird.

161 Albemarle St.,
Springfield, Mass.

LIKED "CATS OF ULTHAR"

I hope you'll wait a long, long time before printing any other Merritt stories. Give us the requested yarns and it sufficeth us.

You really did give us a good break (and hit me right where I live) by printing "Drink We Deep." This is the kind of story I hope to see more of—a real classic and much-requested. DeSoto's cover was exceptionally good, too, though I didn't care at all for his "Woman Who Couldn't Die" effort. Finlay is in top form, too, for the interiors.

Congratulations on "Cats of Ulthar." It's one of HPL's top efforts. But when you say, editorially, that you are sure your readers will welcome new stories and stories from sources other than the Munsey files you are mistaken, I'm sure. Plenty of us want Munsey and only Munsey till the grand old classics are exhausted. We can get new stories elsewhere. F.F.M. can print the yarns from other publications. But in F.N. and nowhere else at all can we get these rare old stories that really pioneered science fiction and fantasy.

Donald V. Allgeier.

104 Riverside,
San Marcos, Texas.

KIND WORDS AND A CORONET

Consider this a testimonial or what you will, but I have a few kind words to say about your two magazines.

You were kind enough to print a short note of mine in the March issue of F.F.M. in which I stated I had some back issues to dispose of. Since the magazine hit the stands some three weeks ago I have received exactly 26 replies. You published a similar letter in

(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from page 8)

the April F.N. and I've already received four answers to that, although the mag has been out less than one week.

While these figures may not seem astounding in themselves, a comparison with the number of replies I received from letters published in two rival fantasy publications makes them take on added importance. I received exactly *one* reply to a letter that appeared in a recent issue of one of these, and none from the other.

Your magazines have long been a valuable help to magazine collectors and I hope they will continue that service. I know I've procured some good items through your letter sections in F.F.M. and F.N. and am certain that I've been able to supply a number of fans with copies of magazines they might not otherwise have been able to obtain.

One other interesting fact: approximately one half of the 30 letters and post cards I received in reply to the letters published in F.F.M. and F.N. were from women readers. The gals evidently go for your mags in a big way.

Glad to hear illustrations are back in F.F.M.

Gerry de la Ree.

277 Howland Ave.,
River Edge, N. J.

FINLAY, LAWRENCE AND BOK FAN

"Drink We Deep" was marvelous! Let others point out why. It's good and that's enough. Ditto "Cats of Ulthar." Ditto, "The Last War."

And my three favorite illustrators—Finlay, Lawrence, and Bok! Ah!

I'm a comparative newcomer to your mags, so I need some back issues. The F.N.s containing "The Ship of Ishtar," "Seven Footprints to Satan" and "Minos of Sardanes"; the F.F.M.s with "People of the Ruins," "City of the Dead," "The Purple Cloud," "The Starkenden Quest" and "Morning Star"; anything before '47. Can any readers help?

And how about "Polaris—of the Snows," "Palos of the Dog-Star Pack," "The Mouthpiece of Zitu," "The Girl in the Golden Atom" and "The Fire People" for future issues? Also "Burn, Witch, Burn!"

I can hardly wait for that Finlay cover. Drooling, I remain,

Nelson Bridwell.

120 N. W. 29th,
Oklahoma City 3, Okla.

FORCED TO SELL

Another year has gone by and *Fantastic Novels* still rates among the best in Fantasy.

However there *is* room for improvement.

Where is Kline, "The Radio" series ('41, remember?), Garret Smith, and the other older items?

With the wealth of material you have, why reprint from *Super Science* and *Astonishing*?

Have you ever considered reprinting "Cosmos"?

I need *Weird Tales* before 1933.

I'm being forced to move soon so I have about 600 duplicate mags to trade or sell. I have four bulging bookcases to store and simply haven't room for duplicates any more.

See you in '52,
Yours,
Howard W. DeVore.

16536 Evanston,
Detroit 24, Mich.

Editor's Note: Kline is in this issue, and coming next issue. We shall consider "Cosmos." Smith and Farley also.

FINLAY PICS GRAND

F.N. got off to a good start in '51. Zagat's yarn was good and Finlay's pics were grand. I even liked H. P. Lovecraft's "The Cats of Ulthar," which is unusual as I don't usually care much for Lovecraft's yarns.

A cover by Finlay will improve the mag's appearance a lot. One of the best artists you've ever used (except Finlay, of course) is Leydenfrost. How about some more illos by him; maybe even a cover?

Some of Stanley Mullen's short stories would be good.

I would like information about a radio serial called "Latitude Zero" presented 7 or 8 years ago. Who wrote it and did it appear in book and/or magazine form?

I have a few mags to sell. All excellent and at face price. From one to three of each: F.N., F.F.M., S.S.S., *Planet*, A.M.F.M., *Marvel Science, Weird, Two Complete Science-Adventure Books, Fantastic Story Quarterly* and *Future combined with Science Fiction.*

Also these books: "Giant's Robe" by F. Anstey, "Frankenstein" by Shelley, "The Twenty-fifth Hour" by Herbert Best, "Lost World" by A. Conan Doyle; and "Eternal Lover", "Tarzan At The Earth's Core", "The Invincible", "The Forbidden City", and "Lord of the Jungle" by E. R. Burroughs. All books good and priced reasonably.

And several pocket books: "Seven Footprints to Satan", "Flying Saucers Are Real", "What Mad Universe", "Out of this World", "Fight for Life" (Leinster), "King Solomon's Mines", "The Dying Earth", "Ladies in Hades", "The Big Eye", "An Earthman on Venus", and "The Princess of the Atom". Also, these mags: *Galaxy S.F.* (No. 3) and *Avon Fantasy Reader* (No. 13).

Please enclose stamped envelope or postal card.

Glenn Lord.

702 E. Belmont,
Pasadena, Texas.

A FINE YEAR

I have read *Fantastic Novels* for some time and think it is excellent. You have in the last year published some of the finest stories of this type that I have read. I think this mag is the best in its field. "Earth's Last Citadel" and "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian" and "The Hothouse World" and now "Drink We Deep"

(Continued on page 12)

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(Continued from page 10)

by Arthur Leo Zagat all tell of a fine year.

The illos in the current issue are above par. V. Finlay's are excellent as are those by Lawrence for the poem. Bok did well for "The Cats of Ulthar" by Howard Phillips Lovecraft. The cover is somewhat gaudy but nice. I don't like DeSoto as well as the others on covers, though he has done the last few for F.N. and F.F.M.

Speaking of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, the new size is O.K. and so is the lack of ads.

I hope F.N. stays as it is.

If any of you fans have any unpublished works of Burroughs for sale, I would be glad to buy.

Books by Doyle or rarer Haggard would be good—even Verne if he is suitable—for your mag. There is one novel by Poe that would be fine for this magazine, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym." It is pure fantasy in my opinion and can be found in the Modern Library Edition of the works of Poe.

F.N. is all that could be asked for although it could be made a trifle more on the brobdingnagian side, or should I say cyclopean? It is not exactly infinitesimal now but I wish it were a little larger.

John Ruyle.

121 Sunset Drive,
Concord, Calif.

LIKED BOK'S CATS

Congratulations on the latest issue of *Fantastic Novels*. It was perfect. DeSoto's cover was the most beautiful I've seen on F.N. in a long time. Finlay's inside pics were wonderful. Like he was in the old days. Zagat's lead novel was fine. Well worth re-reading. Hannes Bok is an old favorite of mine as well as Lovecraft. I especially liked Bok's cats.

Stilson is greatly enjoyed by the majority of your readers and you could reprint "A Man Named Jones" and "Land of the Shadow People" by that author. I would also like to see his short novel "The Curative Fear." Then print "The Brain Blight" by Jack Harrower, "The Woman of the Pyramid" by Perley Poore Sheehan. Many wonderful tales by Philip M. Fisher, Jr., Tod Robbins, Leslie Ramon, etc.

Please give us more Stilson!! He is tops for fantastic romances.

Lynn A. Hickman.

Box 184
Napoleon, Ohio.

"HOTHOUSE WORLD BEST"

Thank hevens watt has happened two *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* hasn't yet beefallen F.N.

Aye bunch of mags stacked up hear wile eye wus gone this summer and fall. Just now eye've had a chance two look them over. July was just fair two medium. Sept. had fine novel but sloppy-picchairs. "Friend Island" was nothing, believe me. "Mimic" was interesting. November's "Hothouse World" was best. A minor epic! January iz ohkay allso.

Eye was very heppy two sea that letter from Buford Yates. He and Eye wure sirvis budies hoo lost track uv itch udder ubout 2 years aygo. He told me than he vas gone two I'll-Ask-Ha, the knew land uf opputtunity, butt eye gas he got coal feet. He's know, off all things, a travelink sailsman! Yore grate mag helped mi gat inn tuch with him.

Tanks a millyun,
Roy Hail.

St. Paul, Minniesoda.

A TRULY GREAT STORY

"Drink We Deep" is truly a great story. The theme was not new when the story was written, but is handled so strikingly as to impress the reader with its differences from, rather than similarities to, other stories. The device of having many different characters supplement the main narrative increased the effectiveness of the story by providing the reader with several points of view and imparts a verisimilitude that otherwise would have been difficult to achieve. Too, the writing itself is excellent, often approaching that of A. Merritt himself for beauty and power of description.

"The Cats of Ulthar" is a beautifully written little gem. It has a sort of quiet grace that places it alongside Poe's "Silence" and Coppard's "King of the World" as one of the classics of its kind.

The poem by Coblentz is quite good and uncomfortably timely.

Illustrations this issue are all superb. Finlay's triumphant return after a couple of issues of mediocre work is a cause for rejoicing; the six works of art in this issue are among his best.

Before closing, I'd like to interject a personal item: if a certain music teacher in Maine reads these lines, would he please write me a long overdue letter?

Robert E. Briney.

561 W. Western Ave.,
Muskegon, Mich.

SUGGESTIONS

Well, it'll soon be '51 at the time this letter is written, so Happy New Year to Finlay and the other artists, the editors, printers and all concerned with bringing us this wonderful magazine. May the coming years be many and prosperous to all of you.

Now for the dissecting of the Nov. '50 ish. H'm! De Soto didn't do too bad on that cover—but, let's use Finlay, shall we? He can beat all the others easily. The only real runner-up would be Saunders. That boy can paint. The lead novel, "The Hothouse World" was pretty good. A new slant on an old theme—death of civilization. And Zagat's "Drink We Deep"—that's more of the type story we want. Let's have more like it. Finlay's illos for the story were fair, but not quite up to par for him. At least I didn't think so. He can do better than that.

The novelette was also good, but I didn't care too much for the Bok illos. The one on pages

(Continued on page 14)

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Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry, and fear—if we provide you with the support you want and need? Learn NOW about this perfected truss-invention for most forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire . . . you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy most of life's activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting fear of Rupture lessened in your thoughts! Literally *thousands* of Rupture sufferers *have* entered this *Kingdom of Paradise Regained* . . . have worn our Appliance without the slightest inconvenience. Perhaps we can do as much for you. Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless *do not despair*. The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

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"I am happy to report that the Appliance that I received from you more than a year ago has given perfect satisfaction in every way.

"In fact, I am not sure I will ever need another one, but I am asking you to send me the best grade as marked on the order blank, then if I should ever need it I would have it. I think I would want to use it when I go for long walks or work at heavy work of any kind, just for protection."—H. M. Herron, Mouthcard, Ky.

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(Continued from page 12)

94-95 was ok, but the one with the girl in it on page 111—ugh! Who could fall in love with a girl that looked like that?

Let's have more Finlay and Saunders on the cover. Examples of their work are on the Nov. '48 for Finlay and Sept. '50 for Saunders. After looking at them, how could you want another to do the covers? Answer that, you fans! And editors!

And now, you readers, this concerns you as well as the editors. What would you think of trimmed edges—and a monthly mag.—and comments by the editor after all letters asking questions or making incorrect statements—and more Finlay covers? I would also like to hear what stories you would like to see in F.N. and what authors. I will tally up all answers and include them in the next issue. I will also send Miss Gnaedinger a statement of the three top stories and authors requested. Come on, fans, let's hear just what you think. That's what this section is for, isn't it?

Gregg Calkins.

% C.A.A.,
Panguitch, Utah.

WON OVER

Have just completed my first *Fantastic Novels* mag—but don't think I'm square on the subject. I've been reading other fantastic and science-fiction mags for eons. I have failed to buy this particular one because the stories are so long. After finally buying your Jan. issue and reading A. L. Z.'s "Drink We Deep," guess I'll be a F.N. fan for a couple of thousand more years. It was great. Got into that fine story and couldn't stop reading. Since I have more time than anything except fantastic and science-fiction mags, the long stories are for me, beginning here.

Leigh Martinez.

LIKES F.N. AS IT IS

Te, spectes parvissema ex credile stella, salüto! I am happy to see that you have at least been conservative enough to leave *Fantastic Novels* in its original form. I am greatly dejected concerning the radical change in its sister magazine, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. It does not at all become the stately patrician office which these two publications hold in the esteem of many.

The new form looks trashy even to the point of being on the appearance of your competitors for looks alone. Thank heavens the macaber essence of your eternizing magazine has not changed in my estimation. My esteem pertaining to your two sister publications has been germinated over a long period of solar time. I verify by laud and panegyric encomium the stately quality of the material by the beak of the hippogriff.

The narrative of H. P. Lovecraft has long been sought for its Cats of the Ulthar.

Vero amicus tuus,
Richard Z. Ward.

P.O. Box 623,
Warren, Pa.

HAGGARD AND MERRITT FAN

Thank you for three wonderful magazines. I have them all intact.

Of course, in all reading there are some stories that impress or depress. We are each individuals, so everything can't please everyone all the time.

I am a Rider Haggard and A. Merritt fan, though I enjoy many of the others.

I have seven of George A. England's books in good condition to sell and several of E. R. Burroughs'. Also, odds and ends, if anyone is interested. Will sell to highest bidder.

B. Vaughn.

339 Broadway,
Reno, Nev.

ENJOYS F.N.

After seeing so many requests in F.N. and F.F.M. for books by Haggard, Benson, Merritt and others, I would like to let your readers know that I have for sale the following books: "Heart of the World," "Jess," "Child of Storm," "Allan Quatermain," "Nada the Lily" by Haggard; "Colin I" and "Colin II" by E. F. Benson; "Jimbo" by Algernon Blackwood; and a fair copy of "House on the Borderland" by Hodgson. All of the other books are in excellent condition. Some of them are first editions and are illustrated. I also have F.N. and F.F.M. back to 1944 or '45. Just send a stamped envelope for a prompt reply. Needless to say, I enjoy *Fantastic Novels* very much.

James W. Moore.

Rt. 2, Box 110,
Morganton, N. C.

WANTS F.N. UNCHANGED

I couldn't down very much of the concoction of Zagat's. "Drink We Deep" was one of those underground civilization things that I never could swallow. I just haven't the type of imagination to entertain this kind of theory. As fantastic an idea as going to the moon, Mars, etc., I and many others can foresee. Even the government is slightly aware of such as this, and might back financially such a trip when it becomes feasible. But the government and everyone else knows of no life like ours underwater, underground, at the center of the earth, "Pellucidar", etc. . . . , and furthermore, it is a safe bet that none exists. To expect such a thing is like planning a long walk on the sunny side of Mercury. And if I see no reasonableness in some fantasy, (some likelihood of its coming to pass,) I can't get interested.

About one-third of the way through the story, I found that by skipping the nutty "Hugh Lambert's Narrative Continued" and reading only the parts like "Account of Courtney Stone, M.D.", or "Continuation of Statement of Edith Horne, R.N.," that you had a first rate fantasy. Just the conception of "wee-men of Wanooka" coming out of the lake, or dead men in the woods, (Finlay's drawings were swell), was good enough. But

(Continued on page 39)

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We don't ask you to believe *us*. Thousands of men and women—first skeptical just as you are—have *proved* what we say. Read *their* grateful letters. Study the guarantee—it's *better* than a free trial! Then try Ward's Formula at *our* risk. Use it for only 10 short days. You must enjoy *all* the benefits we claim—or we return not only the price you pay—but DOUBLE YOUR MONEY BACK. You be the judge! © Ward Laboratories Inc., 1430 Broadway, New York 18, N.Y.

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I must admit I didn't have much faith in it, but I hadn't been using Ward's one week before I could see it was helping me. I could feel my hair getting thicker.
E. K., Cleveland, Ohio

Out of all the Hair Experts I went to, I've gotten the *most* help from one bottle of Ward's Formula.
C. La M., Philadelphia, Pa.

After using Ward's for only 12 days, my hair has stopped falling out.
R. W. C., Cicero, Ill.

I am tickled to death with the results. In just two weeks' time—no *dandruff! W. T. W., Portola, Cal.*

I feel encouraged to say that the infuriating scalp itch which has bothered me for 5 years is now gone.
J. M. K., Columbus, Ohio

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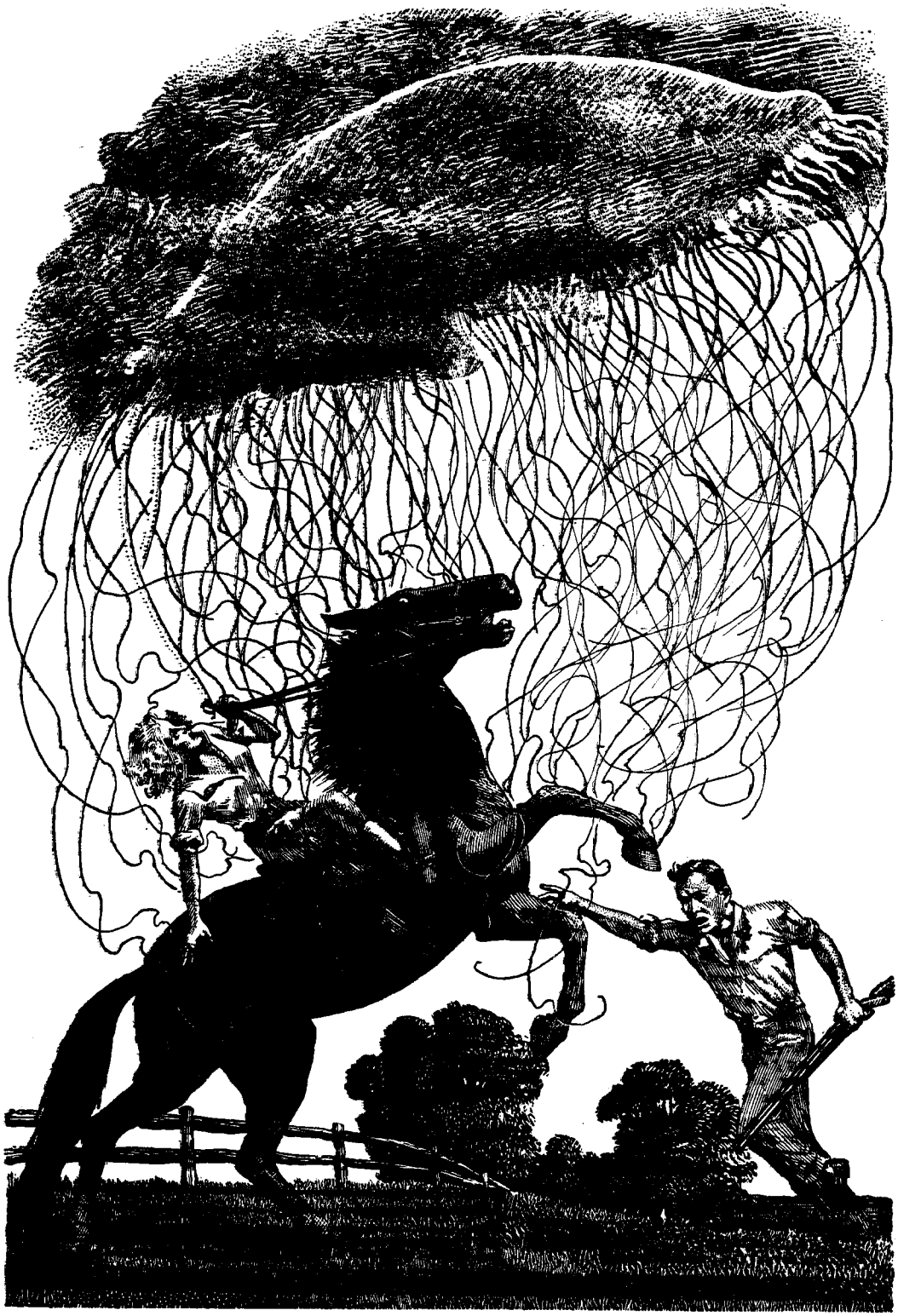

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SPAWN OF THE COMET

By Otis Adelbert Kline

FOREWORD

AS THE coming of that singular visitor from sidereal space known as the "great comet of 1847" or "Green's comet," has been duly recorded by those whose duty it is to chronicle such events, I will merely mention it in passing.

But mention it I must, as it is so unmistakably linked with that menace to all terrestrial life which immediately followed its departure for the cosmic vastnesses, and which came so near to terminating the tenure of mankind on the earth.

It was called "Green's comet," after Sir George Green, the eminent English astronomer who discovered it. Long before it had reached the outer limits of the solar system it blazed with a light that marked it as no ordinary visitor from the interstellar voids.

Indeed, it appeared to have so large and

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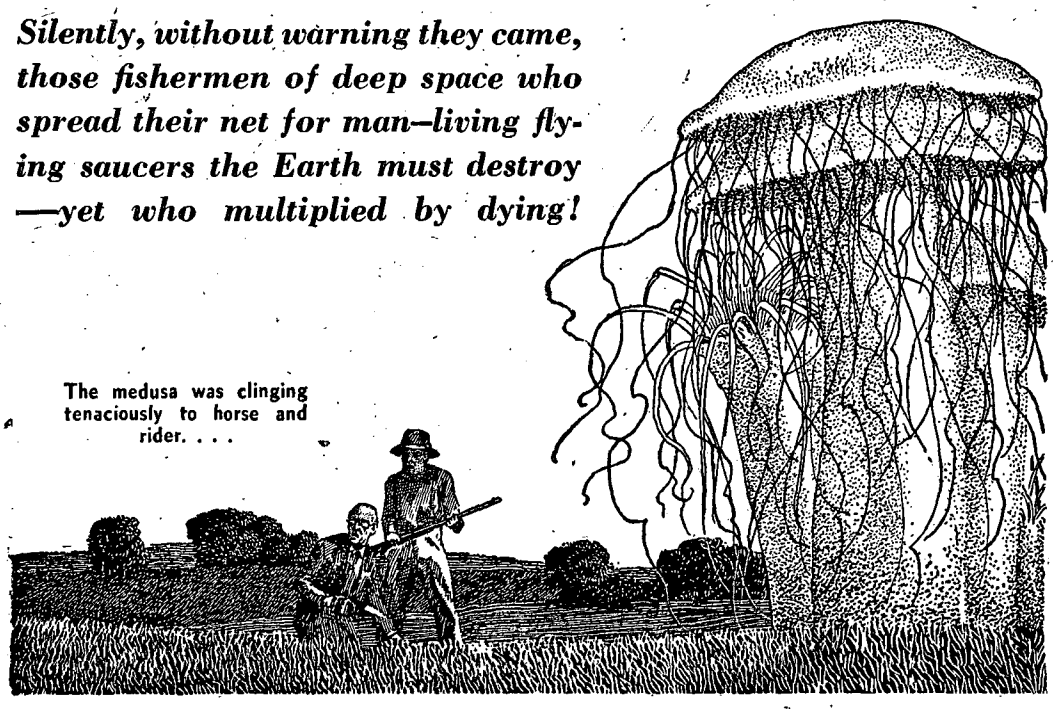
Silently, without warning they came, those fishermen of deep space who spread their net for man—living flying saucers the Earth must destroy —yet who multiplied by dying!



The medusa was clinging tenaciously to horse and rider. . . .

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compact a nucleus that scientists feared the entire solar system would be upset by its visit. But when it passed the orbits of the outer planets and relative perturbations were computed, it was found that despite its great size, its mass was not so formidable as to be alarming.

Because it did not develop a tail as it neared the sun, its immense coma—the nebulosity or head, surrounding the nucleus—was thought to consist of millions of small meteoroids, while what had previously been mistaken for the outside surface of a solid nucleus was spectrascopically proven to be the outer limit of an atmosphere quite like our own, but so filled with clouds of vapor that it was impossible to see the nucleus itself.

It was believed that the comet's atmosphere was warmed and the coma made incandescent by the friction of the meteoroids as they passed through its upper atmosphere, and also by the countless thousands of collisions which took place among them.

There was one thing, however, that caused considerable apprehension. Although the earth, so I am informed, once passed through the tail of a comet without injury, astronomers had computed that on its return journey from its circuit of the sun the head of this comet would pass quite near the earth—might even collide with it.

In consequence, certain religious leaders became vociferous in their prophecies regarding the immediate end of the world with attendant fire, brimstone and such fearsome accessories. The tailless comet, surrounded by that bright, nebulous, translucent coma of huge dimensions, was an exceedingly striking and brilliant spectacle. These prophets of destruction could nightly point to it and thereby gain many followers who garbed themselves in nightgowns and congregated on roof tops, singing psalms and waiting for the fiery chariot to come and taxi them up through the pearly gates.

But, strange to say, though on its return journey from the sun, the comet came within half a million miles of the earth—a very short distance as cosmic space is figured—and for a time looked larger and brighter than the full moon, there were no other signs of its immediate proximity than a few extra storms, earthquakes, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, and a protracted and exceedingly brilliant meteoric shower.

It was that which followed this sudden and unexpected call of our bright visitor from the silent, star-strewn solitudes, which came so near to causing the end of the world, which, for the human race, amounts to the same thing.

And it is this calamity which I have set myself the task of chronicling in order that future generations may know the truth of the matter from at least one eye-witness.

RICHARD PERRY.

CHAPTER I

THREADS OF DEATH

I WAS spending the week-end in the country with Sue.

To me, Dick Perry, one of the cave-dwelling desk slaves in Chicago's busy Loop, that was the height of bliss. Sue Davis, the eminent biologist and biochemist, was my fiancée. We were at the Davis country home.

The comet had come and gone, and the earth, as well as all earthly creatures, had settled down to its former more or less well-ordered existence.

It was Saturday forenoon—one of those drowsy, peaceful, pleasant mornings in late July so characteristic of the verdant Mississippi Valley. Sue and I had gone for a stroll on the farm, had crossed a field of nodding, fragrant clover, and had paused where a single huge hackberry tree cast its speckled shade over a small grassplot.

I was lying on my back in the grass and gazing dreamily up into the clear blue sky, while Sue, seated beside me, wove a garland of clover blossoms. Feeling poetic—I was but twenty-two and Sue nineteen—I began to compare the blue eyes with that of the heavens, and the spun gold of her hair with the sunbeams that danced down through the gently waving hackberry leaves, and to compose a verse suited to my mood. But there came a droning sound, louder than that made by the thousands of bees in the clover.

"The mail plane is coming in," said Sue. "Sit up, lazybones, and watch it land. The field is only a mile from here."

As I sat up the unmistakable droning of an airplane grew louder. Looking skyward, I could not see it at first. But I did see something which I had not noticed before—a small, wispy white cloud scudding rapidly northward. Then I saw the plane coming from the west.

It appeared to me that cloud and plane

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were traveling at about the same speed, and if either changed its velocity or direction, they would meet. Nothing phenomenal in that, of course. I have often seen planes fly through the clouds. But here were the only cloud and the only plane in sight, and it would be interesting, I thought, if they should meet when each had so much open space in which to travel.

As they drew closer together I saw that the cloud was considerably higher than the plane.

"They won't meet, after all," I said, half to myself, half to my fair companion.

But scarcely had the words left my lips ere a strange thing happened. It appeared to me that the cloud, which was roughly disk-shaped with a few ragged streamers beneath, tilted and glided downward toward the level of the plane.

It came to me in the next instant that from our viewpoint the motions of all heavenly objects near the zenith must necessarily be relative—that the plane might have ascended toward the cloud. And yet this would not account for the apparent tilting of the cirrus disk.

Plane and cloud met. For a moment the airplane was completely concealed. But as it emerged once more into view I noticed that it was beginning a steep climb.

"He must be going to loop the loop," I said, but the words had scarcely left my lips when the motor died. It appeared that the pilot had misjudged the amount of speed necessary for the climb and had not opened the throttle enough. The plane appeared to stop for a moment—then fell backward and downward, went into a sideslip, and hurtled groundward, out of control.

Sue gripped my arm and uttered a little scream of terror. We both leaped to our feet just as the ship crashed in a pasture not more than a half mile from where we stood, and about an equal distance from the landing field.

"Oh, how terrible!" Sue exclaimed. "Let's run over and see what we can do. The pilot may not be dead."

"Not one chance in a thousand for that," I answered, "the way he crashed. But we'll hurry over anyway."

We ran across the clover field and climbed the pasture fence.

AS WE neared the wreck we saw three men, evidently from the airport, coming from the other direction. They arrived at the spot when we did.

The plane had struck with one wing down. That wing was partly crumpled by the shock of the collision. The nose was buried in the soft, boggy ground of the pasture, and the fuselage was a twisted wreck. Hanging about it like an invisible aura was a sickening, musty odor—a revolting, charnel scent, as if some ancient grave had been desecrated.

Fearing the effect on Sue of the horrible sight which I felt positive would be revealed, I suggested to her that she look the other way when two of the men from the airport went into the wreck for the remains of the pilot.

But the cries of horror which I expected to hear from the two men did not materialize. Instead, they uttered exclamations of astonishment.

The man who was standing outside the wreck called to one of them:

"What's the matter, Bill?"

"We can't find no sign of a body here," was the reply. "This crate must have been flying without a pilot."

"Maybe Jackson fell out before the crack-up," said the man outside.

"Must have been a long time before, if he did," was the answer, "because I was watching the ship come in, and I'd have seen him if he fell out. Besides, she behaved all right until she passed through the cloud."

"He might have fallen out in the cloud," said the man outside.

"And then flew away with it? Don't talk foolish."

"Well, anyway, he's not here. Whew! What a smell! Notice it?"

"Notice it! I'm strangling!"

The three men dragged out the mail sacks, shouldered them, and moved off in the direction of the landing field.

Sue and I were turning to go when my attention was attracted by several long, silky bits of what appeared to be hair or thread, caught in the rudder. Puzzled by the presence of material of this sort in so unusual a place, I walked closer to examine it. On nearer inspection it appeared like glossy blond hair of rather coarse texture.

I touched a strand of it with an inquisitive forefinger, and an astounding thing happened. With lightning-like rapidity that part of it which dangled beyond my finger and the rudder to which it was attached, assumed the shape of a spiral spring and jerked my finger toward the rudder.

Automatically I attempted to jerk my

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finger away. But the effort was unavailing. Despite the apparent flimsiness of the strand which held it, it was bound as tightly to that rudder as if it had been held by a length of piano wire.

The strand, I observed, was caught in a cleft where the wood had split. I had been pulling downward from this point. I pulled a second time, this time upward, and the strand instantly came free, but it was no sooner freed from the crotch than it wrapped its remaining coils around my finger.

"What are you doing?" asked Sue.

"I have discovered something very strange," I replied, showing her my tightly wrapped finger.

"Why, it's nothing but a hair," she said, and attempted to pull it from my finger, which was already beginning to show signs of congested circulation. But she could neither stretch nor break it. And the two ends had twisted about each other, forming a splice that was as tight and immovable as the other loops.

"Don't touch it!" I warned her, withdrawing my finger. "It's not a hair."

"Then what is it?" she asked, surprised.

"I don't know," I responded, "but something more sinister than you imagine. There are two more hanging on the rudder. Don't go near them. I'll try to get them and take them to your father for examination. Whatever they are, they seem to be endowed with life and an unbelievable amount of strength."

I obtained a dry weedstalk near by and touched one of the remaining strands with it. To my surprise it did not move, but hung as limp and lifeless as if it had been what it appeared to be—a hair or thread.

Breaking the stalk in two, I caught the two strands between the two pieces of weedstalk, and turned them until I had enough purchase to pull them from the cleft. I continued to turn them until they were wound around the stalks. Then Sue and I left for the house.

The walk of a mile and a half to the Davis home occupied only twenty-five minutes. But before we had traversed half that distance my finger, which had turned blue and begun to throb unmercifully, started to bleed where the strands surrounded it. These strands, which I was unable to pull off, continued to sink deeper into my flesh as if they slowly contracted, and I was conscious of a burning sensation, as if some powerful corrosive were searing the wound.

Upon entering the house we found Sue's father, Professor Absolom Davis, working in small but excellently equipped experimental laboratory.

A small man with a pointed, iron gray beard, he is scarcely taller than his daughter, who is five feet two. Yet he has always appeared to me as a man of concentrated, dynamic energy. Despite the fact that we had apparently interrupted some intensely engrossing experiment as we burst unceremoniously into his laboratory, he beamed cordially at us through his large, thick-lensed glasses, and exclaimed:

"Well, well! Back so soon? Did you have a pleasant stroll?"

I briefly related to him the incidents that had just taken place—showed him the strands I had wrapped around the sticks, after warning him not to touch them, and also exhibited my tightly wrapped finger.

After examining it for a moment, he poured some alcohol into a test tube and plunged the numbed digit into it. There was no result except an increased burning sensation where the strands had broken through the skin.

Wrinkling his brow in puzzlement, he put some alcohol into a second test tube, and into this dropped a small quantity of clear, pungent-smelling liquid. I was ordered to plunge my finger into this, but the result was no different than before, except that the burning was slightly intensified.

AFTER watching it for a moment, the professor prepared a third solution, using distilled water instead of alcohol, and dropping into it something with a peculiar, almond-like odor. Almost instantly the two spliced tendrils uncurled, and upon removing my finger from the test tube I was able to unwind the coils as easily as if they had been common thread.

Directing me to thoroughly wash my hands at once, the professor took a pair of surgical scissors and cut off a piece of the substance which had been wrapped around my finger.

The stuff seemed difficult to cut, and snapped like a piece of steel wire when severed. Then he put it under a compound microscope and examined it. The experiment which he had previously been conducting seemed completely forgotten in the excitement of this new investigation.

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"What is it?" I asked, after washing my hands.

He continued to peer through the microscope, slightly moving various adjustments. Without replying to my question, he took the piece he had been examining and immersed it in a blue solution. Again he slid it under the microscope. Then he snipped off a second piece, immersed it in a pink solution, and carefully examined it.

Presently he looked up. Apparently the question which I had asked some minutes before had just broken through his preoccupation.

"I don't know what it is," he said, "except that it is organic and apparently constructed of thousands of long, thin, and extremely tough contractile fibres in a clear plasmic substance which is interlaced with chains of fatty cells that indicate the presence of some sort of a nervous system. This, to judge from the way the strands behave, is both motor and sensory. There are also waxy cells which evidently contain the corrosive digestive fluid which cut through your skin so readily. Here, look for yourself."

I peered through the microscope, but to my untrained eye it appeared that a thin cable, partly pink and partly translucent, crossed the round field. There were specks, blotches, and chains of tiny globules, but they meant nothing to me.

While Sue was looking at it, the professor prepared a slide by coating it with some sticky substance. Then he carefully snipped off a small piece of one of the strands I had brought in on the two stalks, so it fell on and stuck to the slide.

This done, he removed the slide containing the pink-stained fragment, and put the sticky slide in its place.

After examining it for some time in silence, he took down a large glass mortar from a shelf. Holding the two sticks containing the wound strands over this, he snipped off a piece about two inches in length, letting it fall into the mortar.

Then he went outdoors. A few minutes later he returned with an earthworm about six inches in length wriggling in his fingers.

"In the interests of science," he said, and dropped the worm into the mortar. It fell on the strand which he had previously placed there, and which, at the touch of the worm, seemed instantly galvanized into life. With amazing speed it

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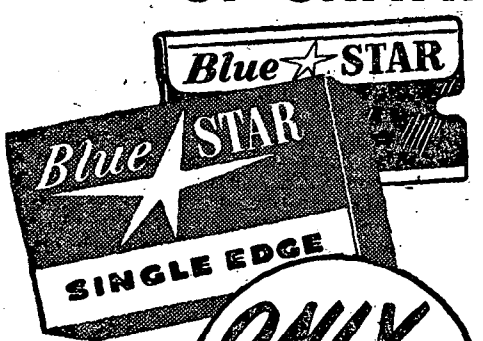

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coiled itself around the squirming creature. Then the coils slowly tightened, the worm becoming more convulsive in its movements, and leaving little streaks of slime on the smooth surface of the mortar as it lashed about in all directions.

Presently the worm was cut in two. Between the severed halves lay a small, slime-smeared coil of what looked like hair. Slowly this coil opened until it had reached its previous length of about two inches. The head end of the worm, more active than the tail, again blundered against the threadlike thing. Once again it was seized in the thin, powerful coils, then slowly cut in two.

"What is it, professor?" I asked.

Continuing to stare at the contents of the mortar through his thick glasses, he replied:

"At present I can only say that it is, without a doubt, a clue to the disappearance—the almost certain death—of Jackson, the aviator. Beyond that I can tell you nothing definite—not unless further experiments reveal something which I have not yet discovered. Run along, now, you and Sue. I must be alone. There is important work to be done. There are investigations to be made which may be of incalculable benefit to the human race—may even save humanity from the worst menace by which it has ever been confronted!"

CHAPTER II

BLEACHED BONES

SUE AND I lunched together, served by Wong, the efficient Chinese butler. The professor never took lunch, and Mrs. Davis had driven to Sterling, a near-by town, for the purpose of doing some shopping. Late that afternoon she returned.

A small, sweet-faced, white-haired woman, Mrs. Davis is rarely perturbed. Sue and I were consequently amazed to hear her talking excitedly to the professor in the laboratory. Then both of them came into the drawing-room where we were seated.

"Some strange things have been happening to-day," she said as she greeted us. "Banker Crolius, of Sterling, while driving home from the country club in his roadster, suddenly disappeared. A farm hand who saw him in the car only a moment before his disappearance, describes a strange cloud which was mingled with the dust thrown up by his car, but which separated from it and sailed away as soon as the car overturned in the ditch. The motorcycle policeman who found the empty car reported that there was a nauseating odor around it, but no sign of Crolius."

"He must have shared the fate of Jackson," I said.

"Without a doubt," said the professor. "But that is not all. Look at this; it's positively ghastly."

He passed me a copy of the evening paper which his wife had just brought from Sterling. Together, Sue and I scanned the glaring headlines, and read the article which followed:

TAMPICO CITIZEN BADLY INJURED BY FALLING SKULL

Believed to Be That of Missing Aviator, Jackson

William Aldrich, a citizen of Tampico, was seriously injured today while walking on the main street of his home town, when a human skull which had apparently fallen from the sky struck him on the right shoulder. It fell with such force that he was knocked down. Examination by a physician revealed two broken bones beneath a very painful bruise. Near the fallen skull the metal frames and broken glass of an aviator's goggles were found.

A moment later a number of other bones, which Dr. Brown of Tampico pronounced those of a human being, fell nearly a block from where Mr. Aldrich had been struck down. These bones were so white and dry that the doctor declared they must have been exposed to the weather for a long period of time.

Among these bones were found a cigarette lighter, some coins, a bunch of keys, several buttons and buckles, and a wrist watch on an aviator's identification bracelet. Despite the fact that Pilot Jackson disappeared not more than two hours before this happened, it is thought that he has been murdered in some mysterious way, and his bones dehydrated and dropped, for the bracelet is his, and descriptions of the other articles tally with those he was known to have carried.

"Do you think they were really Jackson's bones?" I asked the professor.

"I think it highly probable that they were," he replied.

"But how—"

"Come into my laboratory, Dick," he said. "I have something to show you."

As Professor Davis led me into his laboratory, his eyes sparkled with excitement behind his thick-lensed glasses. He bent over the mortar into which he had

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dropped the mysterious fragment of hairlike substance and the earthworm, earlier in the afternoon. Then a look of amazement came over his features.

"Really," he said, "this is most remarkable! Look here, Dick. The creature has grown more swiftly than I thought possible."

I, too, looked into the mortar.

To my surprise I saw that the two inch piece of the odd material had a mushroomlike growth on one end. This end was raised nearly an inch above the bottom of the bowl as if the mushroom growth were a little balloon, gradually lifting the hairlike strand. But this was not all, for sprouting beneath the cap were many other hairs, shorter than the original one, but of the same diameter and evidently growing at an astonishing rate of speed.

"Do you know what it is?" I asked.

"I believe," said the professor, "that we are confronted by a creature unknown to science, and up to the present day, entirely outside the experience of mankind. Unless other similar incidents have occured recently, the strange fates of Jackson and Crolius are unique in the annals of the world. Without a doubt, Crolius and Jackson met the same fate—were attacked either by the same creature or by one like it. And this"—pointing to the thing in the mortar—"is perhaps a reproduction of that creature. I say 'perhaps' because even among the creatures known and classified by science we find numerous instances of offspring which, in certain stages of their existence, bear very little resemblance to their parents."

"Do you mean to tell me," I said, "that the hairlike strand was an egg or spore from which this creature in the mortar is developing?"

"Not precisely that," replied the professor. "It seems that we have to do, here, with a creature that reproduces itself by fission or subdivision—or at least a creature which has the power to do so, even though it may normally reproduce its kind by spores, spawn or eggs.

"I think that we can safely assume, in this case, that the division was accidental so far as the intention of the creature itself is taken into account. The hairlike tentacle was caught in the airplane rudder when creature and plane were both traveling swiftly at right angles to each other's courses. As a result three of these tentacles caught in the splintered rudder were torn loose and carried down with the ship. With my scissors I farther divided the tentacle before placing it in the mortar.

"YOU WILL observe that those tentacles which are still coiled around the sticks on which you brought them have neither moved nor shown any signs of growth. Our experience shows that they will not move unless touched by living organic matter—food. And food, which I supplied in the form of an earthworm, is undoubtedly the reason the piece in the mortar was enabled to grow.

"I have been watching this one closely, and have learned something more. The tentacles themselves, as we have learned before, are not stimulated to action except when touched by organic food, but once the umbrellalike crown has grown above them, they are led to the food by the crown's perception of motion. The worm, as you will observe, has all been devoured, or rather, absorbed, except a few segments from the posterior extremity. These segments are quite near the original and longest tentacle, but they are motionless. The growth of the creature has ceased for a lack of food, with this food quite near it, yet I saw it travel toward and capture the wriggling anterior end again and again until it had consumed all of it.

"We have here an analogy with the two tragedies which took place to-day. Swift movement, apparently, had attracted the parent of this creature to its prey, both in the case of Jackson and that of Crolius —assuming, of course, that both men were taken by the same monster."

"Then," I said, "you are of the opinion that this little creature in the mortar is a miniature replica of the thing that took Jackson?"

"That," said the professor, "is only problematical. It may be of an entirely different form. To draw an analogy from a creature well known to science, and probably the one most closely resembling this creature with which we have to deal, take the chrysaora, a kind of jellyfish. In one state of its existence it is a minute, flat, wormlike affair. This eventually settles down on the sea bottom and turns into a hydra—a tubelike organism with threads. The hydra not only reproduces many other hydras, but eventually turns into the segmented strobila, like a stack of saucers. This, in turn, produces the free-swimming disk-shaped m e d u s a, which is the adult jellyfish.

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"But while the jellyfish is in the hydra stage, many strange monsters, entirely different in appearance from any of these creatures, have been produced by artificial division. For that reason it is possible that the individual we have here is nothing like the parent from which it sprang. The fact that the creature more nearly resembles a jellyfish than any other earthly creature—that it is in fact a sort of medusa of the air—makes this analogy all the more plausible."

He pushed the few remaining posterior segments of the earthworm into contact wtih the trailing tentacle, then watched reflectively while the creature, drawing its umbrellalike cap down to the morsel, slowly consumed it.

Scarcely had the last trace of the earthworm disappeared, ere the creature rose once more, but this time it was able to lift the weight of the tentacle, and started to float upward like a toy balloon dragging the string to which it is attached.

Galvanized into action by this unexpected development, the professor jumped for a butterfly net which was hanging on a hook near-by. His swift motion evidently attracted the creature, for it darted after him, its long original tentacle as well as the shorter ones it was developing, outstretching toward him. But despite his age, the professor was as dexterous through long practice with a butterfly net as is many a younger man with a racquet or foil, and with a quick movement he brought it down over his quarry.

On a table in one corner of the room was a large, finely meshed cage. This cage contained a half dozen cocoons and three large, brightly colored cecropia moths which had just emerged, and which the professor had confined for later observation.

Opening the door of the cage, the professor pushed in the butterfly net, permitting his captive to float up out of the meshes. Then, removing the net, he closed the door and watched the thing floating about in the air near the top of the cage, while he mopped from his brow the perspiration which his sudden and unaccustomed exertions had engendered.

"I suppose the thing will eat my cecropias," he said, "but in the meantime we may learn something more of the habits of this medusa of the air."

Scarcely had he spoken, ere one of the cecropias spread its newly opened wings and started to fly across the cage. With a quick dart, the medusa pounced upon it, and its tentacles wound themselves around the fat, soft body. For a few seconds, the moth fluttered helplessly—then it fell to the floor of the cage, while the wiry tentacles of its remorseless enemy sank deeper and deeper into its yielding thorax and abdomen.

It was the professor who first noticed that the medusa—for such we had begun to call it—no longer depended on its tentacles for the absorption of its food, but had developed a number of small, slightly projecting sucker mouths which all but covered the under surface of the cap. With these it was able to assimilate much more rapidly than before.

In an incredibly short space of time the cecropia had completely disappeared, while the medusa, its cap now doubled in size and its tentacles uniformly about three inches in length, slowly floated about the cage, the frilled edges of its cap rippling like thin fabric stirred by a breeze, but actually doing the work of propelling the creature through the air.

"What do you suppose makes it float?" I asked.

"I've been wondering," replied the professor. "Possibly it has the power to generate a gas lighter than air, which keeps it up. It might, for example, have the power to separate the pure hydrogen gas from the moisture in the air. By Jove! If that is it—"

The professor hastily secured a large test tube, a razor-sharp scalpel, and his butterfly net. Cautiously opening the door of the cage, he inserted the net and soon had the medusa in its folds. Immersing the creature in a large pan of water, he held the inverted, water-filled test tube down over it, and sliding the scalpel under the edge, inserted it in the creature's cap. A tiny bubble arose in the tube.

The professor plunged the scalpel into a different spot, and another bubble traveled to the top of the tube, the creature's arms writhing meanwhile like a nest of snakes. Again and again he pricked the cap until about a half inch of water in the test tube was displaced by gas.

Permitting the rest of the water to run out of the tube, and tossing the medusa back into the cage, where it no longer floated about in the air, but lay writhing and squirming on the floor, the professor carried the tube, still inverted, to a near-by table.

"If this is hydrogen, Dick," he said, "I've found a way to rid the world of this menace."

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THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM

She danced with the wild grace of a wood nymph. . . .

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(Continued from page 14)

we also got the underground theme, some preaching of democracy, a lot of heroic foolishness, and a new vocabulary. The latter is one of those things science-fiction writers of the middle 1930's thought were so fascinating. Zagat put so much emphasis on "kitors", "sloonits", etc.

Well, I suppose the same fate which hit F.F.M. will overtake F.N. by the time the next issue is ready. So I am taking one last long look at this issue as it is. The make-up suits me as it stands.

Bob Barnett.

1107 Lyon,
Carthage, Mo.

CRITICISM

F.N. and F.F.M., as often as I have tried to include them in my collections of reading, have done nothing but raise my ire to the highest pitch. If you reprint magazines, for heaven's sake, leave the dates alone. If a story originally came out in 1931, and obviously using dates in that immediate era, do not debase the 1951 readers by changing the dates to a later era—or if you do change the dates, make them far enough in the future to allow an imaginative possibility.

The morass of words I have just attempted is your Nov. issue. For one thing, high collars and short skirts went out of date long before 1950; and they certainly haven't come back into vogue.

Naturally, there would be changes in author's styles—and there would be discrepancies in their imaginations of twenty years ago, in the now known facts. That, I have no great objection to, but do you have to choose the most illogical for reprints? Those of the most stereotyped phraseology, badly plotted, and by hackneyed authors?

And don't tell me that I have no appreciation of the older authors. I have fantastic story magazines going back to 1938, and several of Abe Merritt's stories which I enjoy re-reading as much now as I did when I first got them. And, I frequently re-read some of my other magazines also.

No—when you begin to print authors who knew how to write and are capable of withstanding the erosion of time, then I will enjoy your magazine.

Glen W. Daniels.

General Delivery,
Capitola, Calif.

JANUARY COVER GOOD

The cover for the January issue is the best in quite a while—surprising in that it was by the same artist who did the one on F.F.M. for "The Woman Who Couldn't Die".

"Drink We Deep" was quite enjoyable, as was the Lovecraft short; how about HPL's "Hypnos" and "The Strange High House in The Mist"?

I have quite a number of items to offer either for trade or sale; a few large *Amazings*, nearly all F.F.M., half a dozen *Uncanny*, a few *Ghost Stories;* "Slan", "Maza of The Moon", "Fox Woman" (cloth) "Black Wheel"; lots of other books, including 20 Arkham House items all mint with d-j which I'll sell for half list price; or I'll trade any of above for Popular Fiction, *Weird Tales* (pre '38).

Winchell Graff.

300 W. 67 St.,
N.Y.C. 23, N.Y.

WILL SELL E.R.B. BOOKS

I have some books to sell by Edgar Rice Burroughs. I have some rare ones which are brand new. "The Moon Maid" and "The Muckers". Others of my rarities are: "The Mad King", "Pirates of Venus", "The Cave Girl" and "The Bandit of Hell's Bend". I also have many Tarzan and Martian books. If you are interested in buying any, write me and I will tell you which ones I have. How about printing some of Burroughs' short stories?

Jack Cohen.

78 Ave. C.,
New York 9, N.Y.

A DEFENSE OF SIBSON'S YARN

This letter is primarily prompted by the sneaky condemnations which still filter in (as shown in a back issue of F.N. at hand) concerning author Sibson's "Unthinkable", published some time back in F.F.M. The dissatisfied with this story seem to be possessed of a long memory and a vindictive aspect which combine to seize upon every opportunity to make a barbed thrust at it without sufficient explanatory backing. According to such specimens it just wasn't fantastic enough. Well, considering our more or less humdrum existance, I'd say that the whole idea of the scientific expedition and particularly the startling events that befell the characters place the story in the realms of a fantastic adventure. Surely the last part is unbelievably fantastic even in this day of menacing atomic power.

Certainly it was a delicious morsel to my mental palate in its heavy, plodding way both of contents and style of depiction. On the whole it was raw physical struggle, not taxing the mind with theoretical or imaginative scope and lacking brilliant wit. Elemental it was, and brooding like its background. To its end it maintained its awe of Nature's forces, both visible and invisible, both tangible and intangible. Man's work of destruction in the end seemed to be but a part of Nature's brooding and violent passions that existed throughout the story—the culmination of them.

To close on a *Fantastic Novels* note, to which magazine this letter is slanted, so far, so good. Your "From The Editor" speaks promising and pleasant volumes. By the way it saves me mention of uncompleted trilogies, sequels, etc. Thank you for your kind consideration.

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enough even to begin with. Then I remembered that most of the cyanides have similar toxic effects to those of hydrocyanic acid; and I was well supplied with potassium cyanide, which I use for dispatching insects. The next question was, how to poison the medusa with potassium cyanide.

"I finally decided to try shooting it through the crystals. Accordingly I removed the shot loads from two shells and replaced them with potassium cyanide. Each shell held nearly a half ounce of the crystals. Wadding and crimping them once more, I loaded my shotgun with them. Then I saturated a handkerchief with a neutralizing solution, making an emergency gas mask, and went to the door of the laboratory, I cocked both barrels, opened the door a little way, and pushing the gun out, muzzle upward, discharged them both. I instantly jerked the door shut, expecting a hundred tentacles to dart after me, but not one appeared. Then I heard the struggles and groans of the monster and knew that my shot had told.

"After the medusa had ceased to groan and writhe, I was reasonably certain that it was dead. I did not, however, know whether or not life still remained in the tentacles. So I snipped one off and investigated. You know the rest."

At this point the telephone rang, and the professor communicated his important tidings to the Secretary of War.

That afternoon was a rather busy one for all of us. We treated machine gun bullets with potassium cyanide solution, and dropped the crystals into shotgun shells. We coated hand grenades with potassium cyanide, mixed with a flour and water paste. Then we began our war of extermination.

The machine gun, we soon found, was the most efficient weapon. After we had exhausted our other munitions, we left the shooting to the skillful corporal, while we performed the disagreeable task of removing the immense, stinking carcass of the giant medusa from the roof. We had to cut it and drag it away in sections, and this nauseating work occupied most of the afternoon.

It was soon learned that even in minute quantities prussic acid, and most of the cyandies, were deadly to the medusae. Their remarkable powers of absorption and assimilation which made their rapid growth possible acted for their destruction when the one poison that had proved so deadly to them was introduced.

It was found that if a single attached tentacle of a stalk medusa were touched with a small quantity of potassium cyanide or prussic acid solution, the entire animal would be poisoned fatally in less than ten minutes.

Airplanes armed with machine guns, the bullets of which were coated with potassium cyanide or other prussic acid derivatives, applied over a thin coating of wax to prevent any chemical action, cruised the skies in search of the flying medusae, and brought them down by the hundreds.

Such products as oil of cherry laurel, technical oil of bitter almonds, and other commercial products containing prussic acid, were found efficient as coatings for bullets.

Closely following on the heels of the first day's prussic acid warfare, a new problem presented itself. The bodies of the dead monsters seemed to putrefy almost as rapidly as they had been able to grow, and not only contaminated the air with a horrible odor, but constituted a menace to public health.

It was Professor Davis who suggested that they be used to fertilize the ground which they had so lately despoiled not only of organic life but of many of its life-maintaining elements. In the country this was done chiefly by cutting them up with sharp disk harrows, then plowing them under.

More than a year passed before the medusae were no longer counted a menace, but in two years it was generally believed that they had been totally exterminated.

As I write the final page of this strange chronicle I am seated at the edge of a certain clover field—the field beside which I was lying in the mottled shade of the hackberry tree nearly three years ago, while Sue wove a garland of clover blossoms—the field which I later saw denuded of all life save the hideous, tentacled stalk medusae.

Above us towers a gaunt specter—the only visible reminder of that terrible scourge that visited the earth three years ago. The dead hackberry still extends its naked limbs heavenward, but now as if in thanksgiving for the vengeance that has been consummated.

The bees are humming busily in the fragrant clover once more. The mail plane is winging its swift way, undisturbed, to the airport. And Sue, my wife, is weaving a garland of clover blossoms.

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ing. The thing is dead, and we are all safe in the house."

As the cloud dissolved it revealed a most astounding and hideous spectacle. Sprawled over the roof, and almost completely hiding it, was the limp, sagging body of the medusa. It lay there like an immense slimy silver-gray pancake with frilled edges, its tentacles trailing limply to the ground in all directions. The body was fully thirty feet in diameter, and the tentacles were at least thirty-five feet long.

The professor opened the door of his laboratory. In his hand was a pair of scissors. He snipped off an end of one of the tentacles which hung in front of the door—then gingerly touched it with his finger tip. It remained motionless. He touched another tentacle, and it did not move. Then he pushed them all aside and leaped out, running toward us and shouting like a schoolboy:

"Eureka! I've found it! I've found it!"

"Found what?" I asked.

"The very thing that I used in the first place to make the tentacles relax—prussic acid," he replied. "Prussic acid or some of its derivatives will do the trick."

With his scissors the professor snipped the remaining tentacles from before the door. Then he held it open for us to enter.

Sue and her mother were waiting there to greet us, and were as relieved to know that I was still alive as I was to learn that they had escaped death. They both shed tears of joy, and I must confess that, as I kissed them, my own eyes were moist.

The professor put in a call for Washington, and the imperturbable Wong brought tea.

"After you and Smith left," the professor told me, "I was busy in my laboratory, when Sievers, one of the farm hands, came rushing in, shouting that a big cloud was coming toward the house. I went out to observe it, and one look through my binoculars convinced me that it was a flying medusa. I told Sievers to bring the other two men into the house at once, and that all of them should bring their rubber boots and raincoats from their quarters.

"As swiftly as possible we closed every window and door, and started a fire in the furnace and one in the grate in the living room. Then I distributed rubber gloves—luckily I have a good supply on hand at all times for laboratory work. In the meantime Sue primed and lighted the two blowtorches for me, and we had two of the portable oxyacetylene outfits for use, one on the first floor and one on the second.

"It suddenly grew so dark outside that we were forced to turn on the lights. I knew then that the monster had settled on the roof to begin its attack. Stationing Sievers and the other two men on the second floor, two to manage the acetylene outfit, and one to use the blowtorch, I remained on the first floor with my wife and daughter, Nora the cook, and Wong. Mrs. Davis and Nora stayed in the center of the living room, Sue guarding them with a blowtorch, while Wong and I patrolled the lower floors with the portable acetylene outfit." The professor paused for breath.

"Almost immediately," he resumed, "the long, deadly tentacles began worming themselves in around doors and windows and through keyholes. Wong and I were busy, hurrying from one place to another and burning them off, and I could tell from the sounds upstairs that the men stationed there were equally busy.

"Although the roaring of the monster made it difficult for us to distinguish what was going on outside, I faintly heard your shots and the explosions of the grenades. Sue had turned the radio on to top volume so I might hear the latest reports while working in my laboratory, and it added its raucous notes to the bedlam of sounds.

"MOST of the announcements had to do with the war against the medusae, and one of them was being made just at an instant when I was looking into the drawing room to see how the ladies were getting along. It stated that a nurseryman near Plano, Illinois, had reported that a number of stalk medusae which had grown in a grove of cherry laurel at his nursery had collapsed as if dead, and were beginning to give off a most abominable odor.

"The statement of this fact set me to thinking. I remembered that prussic acid had apparently paralyzed the tentacles on which I first experimented. Prussic, or as it is technically known, hydrocyanic acid, is present in the cherry laurel in considerable quantities. In this case it was evident that the acid had not only paralyzed but had killed the medusae.

"Leaving Wong to patrol alone for a few moments, I rushed into my laboratory. Unfortunately, my supply of prussic acid was reduced to about a minimum—not

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and those on either side had many of their tentacles burned away.

It was not until we were on the last lap of our journey, crashing through the lane that led to the cattle pens, that Smith noticed something amiss at the Davis house.

"Mr. Perry!" he cried in horror. "Look! Look over there toward the house!"

I looked, and the blood froze in my veins, for where the house should have been plainly visible, I could see only a dense, silver-gray cloud. As we approached it there came plainly to our ears above the sound of our motor the roaring sound which a giant medusa makes when it attacks.

CHAPTER V

THE ATTACKING MEDUSA

"THAT SURE must be a big one from the size of the cloud," said Smith, as he urged the tractor forward to where the huge medusa was attacking the house.

"Ay tank we ban going to have one hal of a fight pretty quick," said Ole, as he loosened the lid of a case of hand grenades.

Smith stopped our tank about a hundred feet from the house. Then we all got out and stepped behind it, using it for a breastwork. Ole tore the lid off his case of grenades, took one out, and setting the timer, hurled it with an expert overhand throw so it exploded just above the top of the cloud. The sound it made was barely audible above the terrific roaring of the giant medusa.

A group of squirming, twisted tentacles reached out at us from the cloud mass as if in reprisal, but I burned them off with the torch.

Smith seized the shotgun, and fired six charges into the portion of the cloud where he thought the disklike body of the monster was located, and Corporal Hansen continued his bombardment with hand grenades. But neither seemed to have any effect on the medusa.

"If the damned thing would only get mad and chase us," shouted Smith, "we could lure it away with the tank."

"Perhaps I can make it mad with the torch," I said, and started toward the house.

But Smith seized my arm.

"Hold on there," he said. "Do you want to commit suicide? One jolt from the batteries of that thing and I reckon you'll be through for keeps. Besides, you might set the house afire."

By this time Ole had used up his box of grenades. Instead of getting more, he dragged out the machine gun and began assembling it.

"Damn' grenades don't work so-gude," he said, "but I bet you dis baby will give it hal."

I handed the torch to Smith, and, reloading the pump gun, began a bombardment of the upper part of the cloud. I doubt whether it had much effect on the huge medusa, but it was all that I could do, and it relieved by feelings somewhat, for I was badly worried. We had found nobody about the place, and, for all we knew, Sue and her parents had already been killed by the monster. It might merely be lingering to absorb their bodies through its tentacles before leaving. There was no way of communicating with them if they were alive, because of the terrific roaring sound made by the attacking medusa.

I was reloading the gun for the third time, and Ole had just finished assembling his machine gun, when the sound made by the monster suddenly changed. At first I thought the professor had succeeded in burning it, causing it to shriek, but this sound was not a shriek. It was not exactly like a howl, but sounded more like a moan—a groaning, unearthly sound so loud that it nearly split my eardrums.

Petrified into inactivity for a moment by this new development, the three of us stood spellbound, watching for the creature's next move. There was a terrific agitation which lasted for some time, accompanied by the unearthly moaning and groaning in ever increasing crescendo. From time to time we could see the ends of writhing tentacles projecting beyond the periphery of the cloud mass, squirming as if the creature were in horrible agony.

"Ay tank dot teeng ban purty damn sick," said Ole, coolly loading his machine gun. "What say we give him some more hal?"

"Wait, Ole," I said. "Something has happened that we don't know anything about."

Scarcely had I spoken ere the writhing and groaning of the monster suddenly ceased and the cloud around it began slowly to dissolve.

Then, to my intense relief, I heard the voice of Professor Davis.

"Dick! Smith! Don't do any more shoot-

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and door tightly closed. As it was unusually warm we made a most incomfortable night of it.

It was three o'clock on the following afternoon before Smtih and I were ready to start across the fields to the airport in our tank.

Smith, who had handled tractors for many years, was to do the driving, while I managed the torch. In addition to these weapons and the pump-gun, we carried a bottle of dilute prussic acid solution and a small brush to be used for removing any tentacles that might wrap themselves around us. My right arm, which projected from the side of the cab through a hole cut especially for the purpose, was protected by sheet metal armor, and my hand, with which I grasped the pole to which the nozzle was fastened, was covered by a heavy leather gauntlet to which Sue had stitched tiny overlapping plates of metal.

Sue, Mrs. Davis, the professor, and the entire entourage were present to see us off.

Farewells and godspeeds were said, and we lumbered off across the barnyard and into the pasture lane.

At the mouth of the lane we encountered our first stalk medusae. They bent down to receive us, and their writhing tentacles whipped menacingly around us. But the tractor knocked the stalks down and trundled over them, almost as if they had not been there, while the spurting acetylene flame instantly severed every tentacle it touched.

We made slow but steady progress, leaving a writhing, squirming, stinking trail of crushed and scorched medusae behind us. After we crossed the pasture we cut our first fence with the acetylene torch, and entered what had been the clover field.

As I looked at the weird, unearthly landscape, I was struck by its contrast with the pleasant scene it had presented two days before, when I had lain in the speckled shade of the hackberry tree listening to the bees droning in the sweet-scented clover while Sue wove a garland of blossoms.

Where the clover had been, the ground was dry and bare between the ugly, tentacle-crowned, silver-gray stalks. The hackberry tree, stripped of its leaves and drained of its sap, stood a gaunt, lifeless skeleton, its bare limbs stretched heavenward as if in a plea for vengeance on its merciless destroyers.

The droning of the bees, the chirping of the crickets, and singing of birds—all were stilled, to be replaced by one monotonous and sinister sound—the rustling of countless millions of writhing, squirming tentacles. And the pleasant fragrance of clover and wildflowers had given away to the disgusting decay-smell of the medusae.

We lumbered slowly across the former clover field, cut a second fence, and entered the pasture in which Pilot Jackson had crashed two days before. Here we found more and larger medusae than we had previously encountered, and our progress was for a time considerably retarded But we got across at last, cut a third fence, and entered what had once been a cornfield. Like the other fields we had crossed, it was completely denuded of vegetation by the rankly growing crop of the invaders from the moon.

As we approached the airport we saw with relief that the landing field had been kept clear of medusae. A squad of men using a flame thrower were kept busy destroying such sprouts as cropped up from time to time.

The surface of the entire field was blackened by the repeated burning to which it had been subjected.

When we cut our last fence and entered the landing field, we were greeted by a loud cheer from a group in front of the airport, and they crowded curiously around us as we approached.

Captain Felton, in charge of the port, greeted us cordially, and ordered the munitions loaded for us. They consisted of several cases of hand grenades, a trench mortar with ammunition, an anti-aircraft gun with ammunition, a machine gun with ammunition, and a number of unloaded shells with material for loading them. As we knew very little about these weapons we detailed a corporal named Ole Hansen to go with us and show us how to assemble and use them.

In a few minutes a sergeant reported that our cargo was loaded. After we had taken leave of the captain and stowed Ole Hansen among the munitions, Smith climbed into the driver's seat. I lighted my torch and took my position beside him.

The men at the airport cheered us and wished us luck as we trundled off over the scorched field.

Soon we were smashing and burning our way back over the path by which we had come. We made much better time than before as the medusae over which we had previously passed were badly crippled,

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Putting down the phone, he turned to me.

"Don't be foolhardy, Dick," he said. "You can't go to that airport on the ground, and you have no means of flying there. Why, the attempt would be suicidal!"

"Nevertheless," I replied, "I have a plan for getting through, and I believe I can make it work."

MY PLANS for making the trip to the airport did not include the use of either the automobile or the road. The land leading to the highway was now almost a solid mass of stalk medusae, and the highway itself had been declared impassable, blocked as it was by the interlacing tentacles which grew clear up to the edge of the concrete. I did have a plan however, which I thought quite capable of being carried into effect.

Among the farm implements was a powerful caterpillar tractor. When I told the professor that I intended to use it and take a short cut across the fields, he was dumbfounded.

"Why, Dick, that would be fatal. There isn't even a cab over it for protection. I can't think of permitting it."

"What if I turn it into a tank first?" I asked.

"Into a tank? How?"

"There are plenty of materials and tools. The old chicken house you tore down had a sheet metal roof. Fastened on two-by-fours and well braced, this will make a cab that will be as good a protection as a closed automobile. And with a few lights of glass from your greenhouse we can make a windshield that will answer our purpose. With one man driving and another using an acetylene torch, we can go through almost anything short of a stone wall. The torch will not only burn any medusae that may impede our progress, but will cut through the wire fences."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the professor. "It sounds feasible enough. Get Smith to help you build that tank. I suppose it will take several days, but the thing will be almost invincible, once it is constructed."

"I don't think it will take two of us long to build," I answered. "We should have it ready for the trip by tomorrow afternoon."

"If you do, so much the better," said the professor. "Go ahead, and while you are at it, I'll do some more experimenting."

Smith and I set to work on our tank shortly thereafter. The other farm hands, reenforced at times by the professor, kept after the stalk medusae that continued to sprout near the buildings, using the acetylene torches. But just outside the little circle kept cleared around the buildings was a solid forest of stalk medusae that stretched as far as the eye could see in every direction. And the air was heavy with the sickening, musty stench that exuded from their silver-gray bodies and deadly tentacles.

While Smith and I worked on our tank, Sue came out from time to time to tell us of the latest developments as announced on the radio. Once she brought us lemonade, and again, tea, sandwiches and cakes.

According to the latest reports, the medusae had adopted their trawling tactics everywhere. Yet they appeared to be aware that their intended prey was thickest in the cities, and swooped down on them in great numbers.

Some cities were approached during fogs or rainstorms when the coming of the medusae went unnoticed, and as a result, thousands of people perished. Even the smallest towns and villages had their lookouts posted, and when a suspicious cloud was sighted whistles were blown, bells rung, and shots fired, in order that everyone might seek cover

Thousands of stalk medusae were sprouting in city lawns and parks, and as a result every fire-making apparatus that could be secured was pressed into use.

It was not until after dinner that night that we heard for the first time of individual medusae attacking closed houses, insinuating their fine tenacles through crevices around windows and doors, keyholes, or any other openings, until they were able to find and kill the inmates by terrific electrical shocks; after absorbing them through the tenacles alone, they would move on again in search of other prey.

Householders were warned to keep torches ready, to have fires going at all times, and to keep soldering irons, pokers, tongs and shovels red-hot, to be used in case of attack. They were warned, also, that when touching a tentacle with a metal object they should wear rubbers and either insulate the grip of the weapon they were using or wear rubber gloves.

That night we took turns watching, the professor, Smith, Wong, and I, with the furnace going full blast and every window

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"These strange creatures appeared to be carrying on an intelligent conversation with each other by means of terrific howls, and at times, seemed to be silenced by a leader, which addressed them all collectively. They are now bearing down on the City of Chicago, and every person is warned to stay within doors, keeping all doors and windows closed.

"Regardless of the heat, fires should be immediately kindled in all furnaces, boilers, stoves and fireplaces as a measure of defense. It is thought that the smoke, cinders and sparks may be distasteful to the monsters, and the fire will keep them from reaching down chimneys with their deadly tenacles. Our air force is trying to break up the line by dropping bombs on it, but as fast as a gap is opened the creatures close it once more. Take heed, everybody, on peril of your lives! Stay inside. Keep doors and windows locked. Build fires."

"Just as I feared," said the professor. "These creatures from another world, perhaps from another universe are more intelligent than they at first appeared to be. They are beginning, now, to work in groups—to exercise their intelligence as well as their instinct for the capture of food. Man has proved a wily and elusive food morsel, so they are uniting forces and trawling for him. Think of it, Dick! A group of monsters from outside space trawling for men, exactly as men trawl for fish! Seems absolutely incredible, doesn't it?"

"It does," I answered. "It also seems impossible that they should have suddenly begun talking to each other. So far we have heard, none of these creatures talked to each other before."

"I don't see anything so surprising about that," said the professor. "We discovered that they had voices, and powerful ones, when I burned the one that attacked you. It is quite possible that, although endowed with voices as soon as they reach the flying stage, they do not actually learn to converse until they reach a certain stage of development. This is true of all creatures with voices—true of man himself.

"A peculiarity of the flying medusae is that they make no sound when cut or blown to pieces. Cutting, puncturing or tearing them evidently does not hurt them. They seem to know, instinctively, that it will not kill them, but that it works actually as a form of artificial reproduction by fission, as each fragment will eventually become a new individual. Burning, however, is different. Burning destroys the living tissues beyond repair. And when they are burned, they shriek. They evidently know that burning means death."

The professor paused, then spoke very solemnly: "Dick, we have a greater menace in the medusae than even I, who recognized their extremely dangerous character from the first, ever thought possible. There is no telling how intelligent they are, or what faculties they can develop in adapting themselves to terrestial environment. It is evident that the adults, at least, have auditory organs. They could not converse vocally without them.

"They apparently have a sense of smell, also, by which they locate their prey. The swift motion of the prey evidently aids this sense, just as waving a bottle of perfume beneath the nostrils makes the aroma more rapidly perceptible than when it is held still.

"They have, I have concluded, no organs of sight—or only imperfectly developed ones. No doubt the comet on which we believe they came has been away from the sun for so many thousands of years that its surface was constantly in darkness. The light from the meteoroids of the coma, when they are made incandescent by passage through the upper regions of the comet's atmosphere, could scarcely penetrate the thick clouds which our astronomers observed any better than they could penetrate an exceedingly dim twilight. Under the circumstances, organs of sight would have been useless, and would probably have atrophied had the creatures originally possessed them.

"It may be that under the conditions which they find on our planet, these monsters will be able to develop their organs of sight. Nor have we plumbed the limit of their intelligence. They may, for all we know, be as intelligent as man himself, or more so."

At this moment Wong entered, and bowed obsequiously.

Captain Felton like make talk Plofessey Davis a long telumphone," he announced.

"Excuse me," said the professor. "It's probably news of the supplies from Washington."

He went to the writing desk and picked up the receiver-transmitter.

"Yes, captain? They are here, you say? I don't know how I'll be able to get them. . . . All right, captain."

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medusae to the edges of the road made it evident that another such trip would soon be out of the question.

Smith and the professor met me as I drove up. The latter looked into the tonneau.

"Got three outfits, I see, and a supply of groceries. Good boy! We'll need them. Let Smith have the car, now, and come up to the house."

I got out, glad to stretch my cramped limbs, and turned the wheel over to Smith.

As the professor and I walked to the house together, he said:

"I've been watching these stalk medusae, and have not only learned something about their feeding habits, but how they begin life on our earth."

"Really!" I replied. "That's important. Tell me about it."

"Yes. They begin life as microscopic, ribbon-like spores—the probable form in which they left Green's comet to colonize our earth. The weight of one of these spores, even in proportion to its minute size, is so infinitesimal that it can float for great distances in even the slightest air currents. It seems, also, to have some electromagnetic faculty which enables it to seize and utilize magnetic lines of force, thus making it possible for it to travel in interplanetary and interstellar space. Its presence here seems to indicate that it has this power, and I have found it is unharmed by liquid air, which approaches the cold space.

"As the creature reproduces by division, a single spore arriving on any stellar body where life and growth are possible can quickly colonize that body.

"Having arrived on earth, I find that a spore immediately sends roots into the soil like a plant, but that it also extends its tentacles in the air in search of animal food. It thus feeds above and below the soil, becoming the stalk medusa so horribly familiar to us. When it reaches a certain size, each stalk turns into twenty saucer-shaped disks, which soon become flying medusae.

"At my suggestion, the government is now experimenting with flame throwers as a means for combating the menace. They are efficient for short distances, and in such limited areas as can be covered by them, but they are far from being the solution of our problem. We must find some other, swifter way. I have ordered some supplies sent from Washington for the purpose of experimenting along these lines. They are being shipped to our local airport. But it will be difficult, if not impossible, to get them, as the roads are now blocked by the medusae, as well as the fields and pastures."

"Can't they fly over us and drop them?" I asked.

"As the shipment will contain some very powerful explosives, I'm afraid that wouldn't be practical," said the professor.

AT THIS juncture Smith came in to report that the oxyacetylene outfits were ready to use, and that quite a number of stalk medusae were springing up around the house.

The professor and I went out and found that Smith had rigged up the outfits quite ingeniously. Each one was installed on a wheelbarrow with the nozzle fastened on the end of a twelve-foot bamboo pole. This pole was laid across a rack which Smith had built on the front of the vehicle, enabling a man to move the outfit about without having to hold onto the pole or turn out the gas.

Each of us took one of the outfits and immediately began the war of extermination against the stalk medusae surrounding the house and other buildings. It was slow work, as there were thousands of them. But after several hours of strenuous endeavor, we had spaces cleared around the buildings wide enough to forestall any immediate attacks from the creatures.

We then turned our weapons over to the three remaining farm hands, who, under Smith's supervision, began widening the clear space we had made. The professor and I returned to the house.

Scarcely had we entered the drawing room when the voice of a very excellent soprano who was singing over the radio was suddenly stilled, and an announcer cut in:

"Sorry to have to interrupt the program," he said, "but I have just received an important announcement by telephone. The Chicago air scouts report that an immense number of the flying, cloud-hidden monsters that are menacing the world are congregating far out over Lake Michigan. The attention of the scout fleet was first drawn to them by hideous, howling noises, so loud that even at a distance of a mile they were easily audible above the roaring of the airplane propellers. Upon investigating, the scouts saw the monsters forming in a long line not more than two hundred feet above the lake.

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apparently from the electrical shocks. Giving Smith the reins to hold, I helped the professor as he bent over her, painting the tentacles that still encircled her body and arms with diluted prussic acid from the bottle he had in his pocket.

As I was chafing her hands, I saw the last of the medusae rise and sail away, avoiding us—probably because of the smell of its burned comrade. They had all escaped while we were fighting to save Sue. We took her to the house, where we left her under her mother's care.

That afternoon I drove to Sterling in the professor's sedan to get some oxy-acetylene torches which we planned to use as weapons of defense. As I sped along over the smooth concrete pavement I was surprised and horrified at the number of colonies of stalk medusae that had sprung up overnight. Some of the cornfields were nearly obliterated by them. And in a few of the pastures I saw individuals undergoing the metamorphosis which indicated that they had been well fed.

Upon my arrival in Sterling, I stopped at a garage which I knew did welding, and tried to buy an outfit from them. They had only one, which was not for sale, but referred me to a wholesaler who would sell me as many outfits as I wanted.

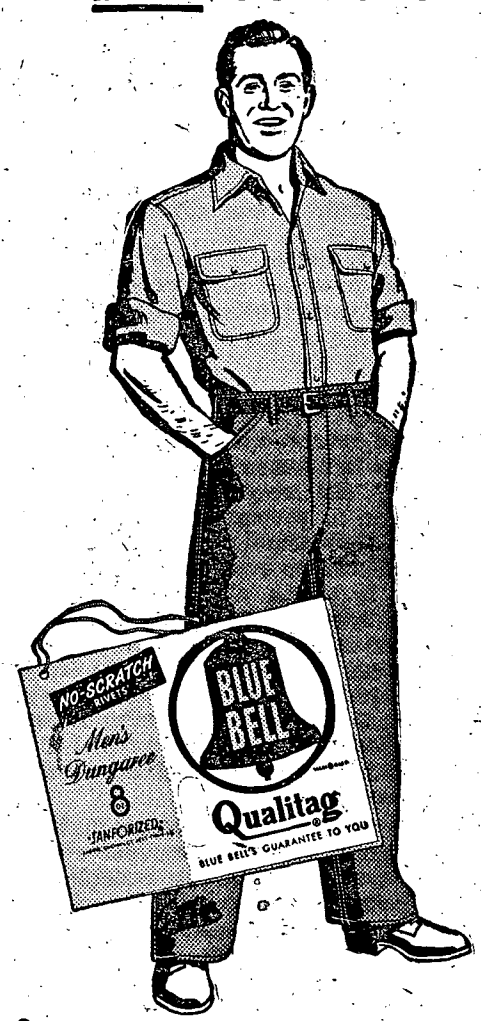
I repaired to the office of the wholesaler, and bought three outfits with extra drums of gas, which I loaded into the back of the sedan. The wholesaler told me that the government had issued a warning to use only closed automobiles and airships. Several medusae, he said, had been shot down with anti-aircraft guns, but no means had been devised of dispatching them after they fell, and they had eventually escaped. Machine gun bullets fired from airplanes, he said, had proved ineffective, although some of the medusae thus attacked had been noticed to fly erratically or sink slightly for a time.

The medusae, he said, had spread to every continent of the world, and an international conference was being held for the purpose of devising a method of combating this menace to humanity.

I stopped at a grocery store and filled every available space in the car with bacon, ham, flour and canned goods. Then, after buying all the papers I could get containing news of the latest developments of the medusae invasion, I took to the highway.

I got back to the farmhouse without incident, but the proximity of the stalk

How to buy better work clothes



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"It's worse than either," I replied. "When you get your torch going I'll show you what to do."

Before the farm hand succeeded in getting his torch to roaring, two more medusae arose, and I brought them down. But, unfortunately, I fired at one too soon and it fell among its treelike fellows where the professor did not dare to approach it.

The professor was searing his fourth medusa when I shot down the sixth, telling Smith to watch the professor, then imitate him.

Before the seventh arose, the fifth, which I had shot down among the others, got up once more, thus affording me a demonstration of the marvelous recuperative powers of these creatures. Although I must have riddled and emptied practically every helium-filled cell in its body, it had closed the rent and refilled them in this marvelously short space of time. This time I was careful not to shoot until it had cleared its treelike fellows.

Twenty flying medusae in all arose from the stalk that had devoured the calf. When I had shot down the last one, I saw that the three creatures that had seized the cow had relinquished her dry bones, and were also forming into segemnts. It was evident that I would have to do some fast shooting when these segments started to fly.

Before the first one arose, Sue came cantering up on Blue Streak, her favorite saddle horse. It was her custom to ride each morning before breakfast, and hearing the shooting, she had ridden out to investigate.

"What are these things, and what in the world are you doing?" she asked.

"They are medusae passing through one of their life stages," I replied, "and I'm shooting them down as fast as they start to fly, while your father and the hired man kill them with the torches."

"Can't I help you?" she asked. "Please let me do something."

"My supply of shells is running low," I said. "You might dash back to the house and get me as many as you can carry—fours, twos, and threes."

"Splendid!" she replied, wheeling her mount. "I'll bring my gun, too, and help you."

I had thought to keep her out of danger for the time being by sending her back to the house, but to my horror, the first three disks from the three monsters that had devoured the cow, rose, turned over, and sailed after her, evidently attracted by the rapid movement of her mount.

I brought down the foremost with two quick shots, but in my haste and anxiety I missed the second, so I was forced to waste two more charges on it. I fired my last shot at the third, causing it to sag slightly, then pushed another shell into the magazine and quickly pumped it into the chamber. But to my horror I saw that I dared not fire again. The medusa was now so close to Sue that, to fire would mean that she and her mount must surely be struck.

Shouting to the others to attract their attention, I started after Sue on the run. But before I had taken a dozen steps I groaned in anguish as I saw the monster dart downward, its tentacles encircling horse and rider. The roaring sound which it made as it attacked was punctuated by screams of pain and terror from girl and horse as the electrically charged tentacles seized them.

"Turn your horse, Sue!" I shouted. "Ride this way!"

But Sue was by this time enveloped in the dense cloud which surrounded the monster's disklike body.

CHAPTER IV

BESIEGED WORLD

THE MEDUSA was clinging tenaciously to horse and rider when I shouted to Sue to turn her mount. She must have heard me, for the horse suddenly wheeled and came galloping in my direction.

I could not see Sue, who was completely enveloped by the cloud which surrounded her attacker, but knew that she must be struggling frantically in its clutches, from the way it moved.

Calling to Blue Streak, I seized his bridle, but he was so terrified he dragged me fully a hundred feet before I could bring him to a stop.

In the meantime the professor and Smith arrived with their guns and torches. They started in at once, burning the writhing tentacles first. This frightened the horse still more, and he pranced while I clung to the bridle.

It only took the two men a few minutes to get Sue out of the saddle and destroy the shrieking creature that had attacked her, but to me those minutes seemed like hours. She was unconscious,

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Slipping into a hunting coat, I loaded the game pockets with the torch and all the ammunition they would safely bear. Then, taking the two guns, I hurried back to the pasture.

The professor had approached to within fifty feet of the outer line of monsters. One of these, the one which had captured the calf, had grown considerably taller. Whereas it had been about twelve feet in height before, it was now nearer eighteen and still growing. The remains of the calf, still clutched to the mouthlike opening at the top, were barely visible as a rounded, dark mass showing here and there in the wilderness of tentacles which surrounded it.

The three creatures that had captured the cow had also increased in size, and what we could see of the helpless bovine had dwindled tremendously. They continued their arched position over the carcass, feeding noiselessly, and apparently without any competition among themselves, unless it was one of speed.

"Quick!" said the professor. "Give me the torch. I can be generating it while you load the gun."

I handed him the torch and proceeded to load the two shotguns.

"What can we do with shotguns against these monsters?" I asked.

"Nothing, at present," he replied, lighting the generator of the torch and working the pressure pump, "but if a certain theory of mine is correct we will soon have considerable use for them."

"Which gun do you want?" I asked.

"The double barrel," he replied. "When you start you will probably have to shoot straight and often. I only want the double barrel in case of an emergency, as I plan to use the torch. Give me about a dozen extra shells."

I HANDED him the shells, and he put them in his pockets after looking at the wadded ends.

"Number fours," he said. "About as good as any, I guess. Did you bring nothing but fours?"

"I also brought a dozen loads of buckshot," I replied, "and one box of number twos."

"We'll try the fours first, at any rate," he said. "Now I want you to watch the creature that captured the calf."

I looked, and saw that it had now reached a height of about twenty feet. Its victim seemed entirely consumed. But the most startling thing I noticed was the strange metamorphosis that was taking place in the shape of the creature itself. The cylindrical body seemed to be separating into a number of disk-shaped segments, piled one on top of the other like stacked dishes. Tentacles were beginning to branch out from the top of each segment.

"If I am not mistaken," said the professor, "the top segment will presently arise and sail away, or rather attempt to sail away, for as soon as it flies clear of the others, I want you to shoot it down. If it is far enough from them to make it safe for me to approach it, I can then destroy it with the torch."

It was not long before a dense cloud of vapor formed around the top segment. Suddenly it rose and turned over, dropping the whitened bones of the calf. Then it sailed slowly away over the heads of its fellows, its wiry tentacles trailing below. As soon as it was beyond range of their tentacles, I fired into the most dense part of the cloud. It dipped slightly. Again I fired, and it slowly sank to the ground.

"Watch the next one," shouted the professor, running to the one I had brought down, torch in one hand and shotgun in the other. "Don't let any of them get away."

As he turned his torch on the writhing, squirming mass that lay on the ground, it gave vent to a shriek similar to the one which had rung in my ears the night before. Again and again it shrieked under the relentless flame. The noise distracted my attention for a moment and I looked back at the monster I was supposed to be watching, just in time to see a second cloud-covered medusa sail away. Two shots brought this one to the ground as they had the former. Meanwhile the shrieks of the first creature ceased and the professor moved on to the second to start another pandemonium with his searing torch.

Pushing four more shells into the magazine, I waited for the next medusa to arise. The farm hand had, meanwhile, come up with another blowtorch and a double-barreled shotgun.

"The professor told me to pen up the cows and bring these," he said.

"Light your torch," I told him. "As soon as you get it going you can help the professor."

"What in tarnation's he burnin'?" asked Smith, priming his own torch. "Smells like feathers or old shoes, or somethin'."

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Then Mrs. Davis ordered us all to bed with a firmness that would not be gainsaid.

EARLY the next morning Wong awakened me with a gentle knock at my door, and upon my bidding him enter, brought me a demi-tasse and cigarettes.

"Plofessey Davis like see you along lab'toly plenty quick," he said.

"Tell him I'll be right down," I replied.

I dressed and hurried downstairs. The professor was waiting in his laboratory.

"Dick," he said, "something has happened since last evening that has, it seems to me, a rather sinister significance. I haven't told my wife or Sue, as I don't wish to alarm them."

"What has happened?" I asked.

"Come with me," he replied. "I told my wife you and I were going for a walk, so we can go out without arousing her suspicion. Sue, I believe, is still sleeping. The poor child is exhausted after the ordeal of yesterday."

After threading our way among the various outbuildings, we entered the lane between a corn and wheat field which led to the pasture. Traversing the lane, we came to the pasture itself. Sue and I had crossed it only the day before, and it had revealed at that time, only the undulating, blue grass.

But overnight there had sprouted, near its center, a colony of gray-white growths, varying in height from three to nearly twelve feet. They were roughly cylindrical in shape, and their tops were fringed with squirming, wiry tentacles, some of which reached nearly to the ground, while others stood at various angles at or near the horizontal, and still others reached skyward.

That the movements of the tentacles were not due to the morning breeze was quite evident from the fact that they moved in all directions. The cylindrical stalks, also, bent in various directions from time to time, almost as if they were bowing to each other, and those that bent toward us revealed cavernous openings at their tops, greatly resembling the mouths of anemones.

The wind, blowing from them to us, carried the revolting charnel smell that had become so familiar to us.

"What are they?" I asked.

"You know as much as I," replied the professor. "They may be one of the life phases of the cloud-medusae. From the similarity of their tentacles, and the analogy we have in our submarine medusae, as well as the similar, I might say identical stench that emanates from them, I am inclined to think this is the case. Yet they might be a totaly different race of creatures, which have traveled to us simultaneously with the medusae, from the space wanderer which we believe is responsible for this unprecedented invasion. Only a careful observation of them will tell."

While we were talking, Jake Smith, the professor's farm hand, approached, driving a herd of cattle before him with the assistance of a young collie. The racket they made—the clatter of hoofs, the bawling of cattle and calves, the barking of the dog, and the shouts of the man—seemed to have a magnetic effect on the strange growths before us, for instantly all bent toward the herd, mouths gaping and tentacles wriggling menacingly.

With the herd were three calves which showed a tendency to wander. While the collie was bringing in one of these strays another got away and scampered straight toward the mysterious growths. As it drew near them, all bent toward it, and when it would have run between two of the tallest, the nearer, arching its cylindrical stem like a striking serpent, suddenly pounced upon it and bore it struggling and bawling, aloft, hopelessly entangled in the myriad tentacles.

Then the mother cow, evidently attracted by the cries of distress of her doomed offspring, dashed after it. By the time she reached the thing that held her calf aloft, the little creature's cries had ceased. She ran helplessly around the stem for a moment, then backed up as if about to charge it head on. But she backed within range of the tentacles of three more of the horrible monstrosities, which instantly bent over and seized her, holding her helpless.

The farm hand and dog rushed after her, but the man was warned off by the professor, and he succeeded in calling off the dog before it was too late.

"Go back to the house, Dick," said the professor. "Bring my blowtorch as quickly as you can. Also my twelve-gauge pump gun and twelve-gauge double barrel, with as many shells as you can carry. I'll stay here and watch. Hurry!"

As fast as my legs would carry me, I dashed toward the house. I found the professor's blowtorch in the laboratory where he had left it the night before; and having gone shooting with him many times, I knew where to find the weapons.

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WHEN I came to my senses once more, I was lying on a davenport in the drawing-room. The professor was holding a phial of some pungent aromatic beneath my nostrils, while Sue and Mrs. Davis chafed my hands.

I blinked, sat up, and tried to remember what had happened. Then it all came back to me—the grip of wiry tentacles, the roaring sound, the numbing shocks, the sickening stench, and that horrible shriek. I remembered it as sounding something between the wail of a steam siren and the scream of a woman.

"Better lie down for a while, Dick," cautioned the professor. "You've had a narrow escape. If that animated galvanic battery had been just a little more powerful you could never have recovered from those shocks."

I leaned back on the cushions, for it made me giddy to sit up.

"I passed out when the thing screamed, or at least I thought it screamed," I said. "What followed?"

"When you thought it screamed," said the professor, "you were right. It screamed not once, but again and again. It roared before it screamed. Didn't you hear it roar?"

"I heard a roaring sound," I replied. "I didn't know whether it was made by the torch or the creature."

"Possibly it was both," said the professor. "The roaring of the monster sounded very like the roaring of the torch, except that it was louder. It began to roar as soon as its tentacles touched you. I could tell by the spasmodic jerking of your muscles that it was sending an electric current through your body, and quite a powerful one.

"There are a few animals already known to science which have this power. Some of them are deep sea creatures, but the electric eel of Brazil is the most striking example. This eel, when its electrical organs are fully charged, is said to be capable of rendering a man or a large animal unconscious from electric shock. So it is not surprising that this creature, so many times larger than the largest electric eel, was able to do the same for you, with a number of shocks.

"My torch began to function just as the creature attacked you, and I first tried to rescue you by burning off the wiry tentacles. But it had so many of these in reserve that the task seemed endless. I, too, was attacked and had the creature's store of electrical energy not been depleted by the shocks it had sent through your body, it is probable that both of us would have been rendered unconscious and ultimately devoured. As it was, I was rapidly becoming helplessly entangled in the tentacles, so I turned the torch on the monster's body. It was then that it shrieked—not once, but many times. The volume of its terrible voice was astounding; its weird tones were horrible to hear!

"But the torch finally won. All the tentacles let go except those which had been burned off, and the thing, after bumping around on the walls for a time, flew against the window screen with such force that it was ripped from the frame. Then it disappeared, still screaming weirdly, into the night.

"I made a very weak solution of prussic acid and painted the remaining tentacles with this. There were quite a few around your arms, legs and body. One also was tightly bound around your forehead. All relaxed instantly when the solution was applied. I then used it on the tentacles which still clung to me, after which Wong and I carried you here."

"Was it prussic acid solution you used on my finger this morning?" I asked. "That stuff, that had a bitter almond odor?"

"That was it," replied the professor. "Prussic acid has a paralyzing effect on the nervous system. It is a good thing that I learned, this morning, that it will cause the tentacles of these creatures to relax. It would have been dangerous to have had to experiment with the longer tentacles in the position they had gripped you this evening."

"I have always thought," I said, "that the touch of prussic acid to the human skin was poisonous, particularly to a cut surface, and that one whiff of the fumes was usually deadly."

"So it is," replied the professor. "In a sufficiently strong solution it would be deadly to apply it to an abraded skin, and one whiff of prussic or hydrocyanic acid gas is usually lethal. But the solution I used was diluted sufficiently to make it safe for application to the human skin, or even to an open wound. I purposely made a weak solution this morning, intending to make it a little stronger if necessary, but as you saw, it worked."

At this moment, Wong entered with a tea tray and a steaming pot of fragrant Darjeeling.

I sat up for my cup of tea, and we discussed the strange incidents of the day.

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odor like that I had noticed at the wreck of Jackson's plane.

The professor, alert scientist that he was, seized a glass tube and a rubber plug for each end. Then he rushed out into the kitchen. A few moments later he returned with the tube packed full of crushed ice. He wiped it thoroughly with a towel, then opened the door of the cage and thrust the tube into the densest part of the vapor.

When he withdrew it, it was covered with large drops of moisture.

These he scraped into a test tube which he held up to the light for a moment, shaking it slightly as if to note its viscosity. Then he went to the table, put it in a test tube rack, and quickly prepared a number of solutions in other tubes. Into each of these he dropped a minute quantity of the liquid he had collected—pausing in each instance to note the result.

In watching him, I had forgotten to keep an eye on the cage. Presently I thought of it once more and turned to look at it. To my surprise I saw that it was completely hidden by a dense cloud of vapor—a disk-shaped cloud that was a perfect miniature copy of that into which Pilot Jackson had plunged, never to emerge.

The professor looked up from his experiments.

"Water, Dick," he said, "nothing but water. The mystery is, how is it able to collect and hold a cloud symmetrically around it? I rather suspect—"

He paused in amazement as he suddenly noticed how large and dense the cloud had become around the cage.

"Why, this is astounding, Dick," he said. "I had no idea it could grow so huge on a few pounds of meat. Perhaps we had better—"

He was interrupted this time by a rending crash, which came from the interior of the cloud. Then it rose toward the ceiling, and on the table our startled eyes saw the remains of the cage with its four sides bulged out, its top tilted back, and its frame splintered. Lying on the bottom of the cage, as white as if it had been kiln-dried, was the leg bone which had been in the roast.

The disk-shaped cloud, now nearly four feet in diameter, was floating around the edges of the ceiling, evidently looking for a means of egress from the room. Beneath it trailed more than a hundred squirming, wriggling tentacles, partly concealed by several little ragged streamers of vapor.

"Don't move, Dick," said the professor softly. "We are both in deadly peril. I have a plan."

Slowly, cautiously, he reached beneath the table. He groped there for a moment, then brought out a gasoline blowtorch. Turning a valve, he filled the generator. Then he struck a match and ignited it. I noticed that when he made the quick motion necessary for the lighting of the match, the tentacles of the creature floating above us suddenly extended toward him as if attracted by the movement.

The professor noted this, also, and worked the air pump of the torch slowly and carefully, while he kept an eye on the medusa. The creature had halted, its tentacles still extended toward him, as if undecided whether to attack or not. Presently it began to float slowly in his direction.

Knowing that he would be unable to get his torch going in time to use it effectively, I looked about for a weapon. Across the room, at a distance of about ten feet from me, was the professor's golf bag. The driver and brassie reared their heads invitingly above the other clubs. If I could but get one of them!

The medusa drew nearer and nearer to the professor, who coolly continued to work the pressure pump. The torch began to roar, but I knew it would not be in operation for at least another half minute, and the exploring tentacles were now less than a foot from the scientist.

Had I been content to move slowly, I might have averted that which followed. But I arose with rash haste and leaped toward the golf clubs.

Before I could make a second move, with a suddenness that was appalling, the monster pounced on me. At the first touch of those wiry tentacles I felt a terrific shock, as if a powerful electric current had passed through my body. Every muscle was numbed, stiffened. I was unable to move a finger.

A second shock followed—a third. There was a roaring in my ears; there rose a penetrating stench like that of burning feathers. I could feel the wiry tentacles biting into my flesh, yet the numbing waves that came from them rendered the wounds almost painless.

The roaring sound increased. I heard a horrible, wailing shriek. Then things went black before my eyes and I lost consciousness.

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"How is that?"

"By fire," he answered. "A spark, a shell, a rocket, or an explosive bullet will turn each creature into a roaring furnace of flame."

Standing the inverted tube on the table for a moment, he picked it up with a test tube holder. Then he lighted a taper and held the flame in the mouth of the tube. Nothing happened. He thrust the flame still higher. It sputtered and went out.

"No use, Dick," he said. "Had that been hydrogen, we should have had a small explosion. It's something else. I'll have to make further tests."

Still keeping the tube inverted, he inserted a rubber stopper in the mouth. Then he stood it upside down on the table.

At this moment Sue entered through the door which led to the drawing room.

"Mother and I just heard fearful news on the radio," she said. "Thirty-six airplanes in various parts of the country have crashed. The occupants have not been found. More than a hundred people have disappeared while driving their automobiles, and most of the machines have been wrecked as a consequence. Recognizing the fact that something in the air must have snatched these people from their machines, the government has sent scout and combat planes to investigate. Similar reports have been received from Canada and Mexico, and the air forces of these two countries are patrolling the skies in an effort to learn the cause of the mystery. What does it mean? What can we do?"

"It means," said the professor soberly, "that I must get in touch with the War Department at once and tell them what little I know. Then I must, somehow, continue my experiments."

CHAPTER III

THE THING IN THE LABORATORY

AFTER DINNER the professor and I returned to his laboratory. He had called the War Department, and supplied them with such information as he had.

We found the caged medusa more than doubled in size, floating about as if searching for more prey. The cecropias had all been devoured. The punctures made by the professor's scalpel had disappeared, and the cells which he had deflated were not only increased in size proportionately to the animal's growth, but completely filled out with gas once more.

While I watched it moving about, the professor tested the gas which he had confined in the tube. Presently he called to me:

"I've found it, Dick. It's helium. How the creature obtains it so rapidly is a mystery to me, as there are only four parts to every million parts of air, and proportions in its organic food must be very slight. But it is unmistakably helium, so fire will only be effective against it in such local areas as it can reach directly."

"But what about explosive shells?" I asked.

"The monsters could be blown into fragments, of course," he replied, "but remember, each fragment would become a new monster. Fighting these giant medusae of the skies with shells would simply mean multiplying them."

"Then what can we do?" I asked.

"That," he replied, "is what we must find out as quickly as possible. In order to do this we must take some risks. We must experiment and observe until we can find the weak spot in this creature's defense. I am about to sacrifice to-morrow's roast for the good of the cause."

So saying, he went out, and I heard him talking to the cook in the kitchen. A moment later he returned with a raw leg of lamb which he thrust into the cage.

The medusa, evidently attracted by the movement, soared downward, tentacles extended, as we had previously seen it do when attracted by the motion of organic matter. A tentacle touched the raw meat and in a moment the creature had settled down over the roast to feed.

The professor sighed.

"My favorite food," he said, "but it is going in a good cause. And we have, so the cook tells me, a smoked ham which will go well with some fresh eggs."

The medusa fed noiselessly, but with apparent voracity. As the meat dwindled in bulk, the body of the medusa increased in size, its tentacles lengthened proportionately.

Almost before we realized it, the body of the creature was more than a foot in diameter, while the tentacles had reached a length of nearly eighteen inches, yet the roast was not more than half consumed. Then a queer thing happened. The cage began to fill with vapor—silvery white like a cirrus cloud on which the sun is shining. And I began to grow increasingly conscious of a sickening, musty

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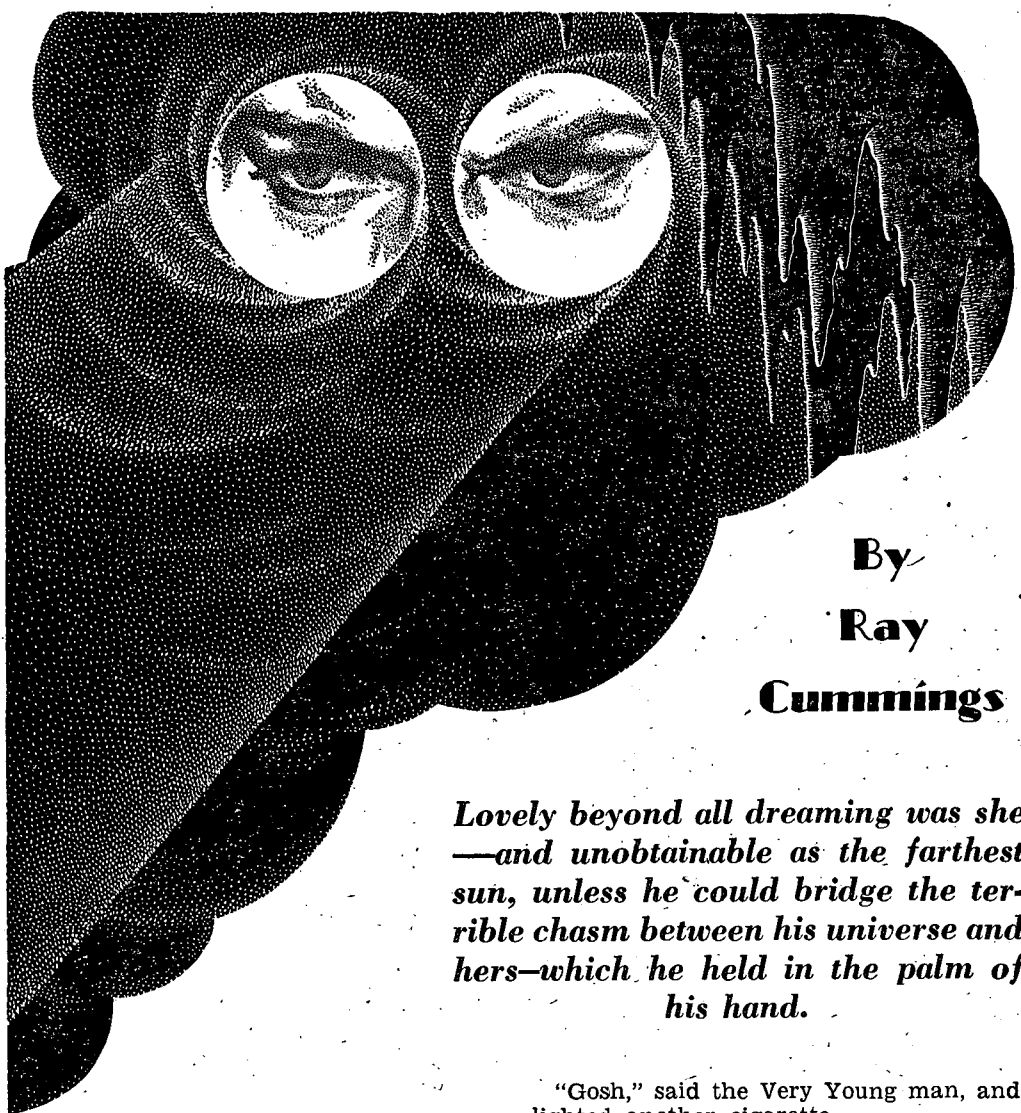

By Ray Cummings

Lovely beyond all dreaming was she —and unobtainable as the farthest sun, unless he could bridge the terrible chasm between his universe and hers—which he held in the palm of his hand.

CHAPTER I

A UNIVERSE IN AN ATOM

"THEN you mean to say there is no such thing as the *smallest* particle of matter?" asked the Doctor.

"You can put it that way if you like," the Chemist replied. "In other words, what I believe is that things can be infinitely small just as well as they can be infinitely large. Astronomers tell us of the immensity of space. I have tried to imagine space as finite. It is impossible. How can you conceive the edge of space? Something must be beyond—something or nothing, and even that would be more space, wouldn't it?"

"Gosh," said the Very Young man, and lighted another cigarette.

The Chemist resumed, smiling a little. "Now, if it seems probable that there is no limit to the immensity of space, why should we make its smallness finite? How can you say that the atom cannot be divided? As a matter of fact, it already has been. The most powerful microscope will show you realms of smallness to which you can penetrate no other way. Multiply that power a thousand times, or ten thousand times, and who shall say what you will see?"

The Chemist paused, and looked at the intent little group around him.

He was a youngish man, with large features and horn-rimmed glasses, his rough English-cut clothes hanging loosely over his broad, spare frame. The Banker

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drained his glass and rang for the waiter.

"Very interesting," he remarked.

"Don't be an ass, George," said the Big Business Man. "Just because you don't understand, doesn't mean there is no sense to it."

"What I don't get clearly—" began the Doctor.

"None of it's clear to me," said the Very Young Man.

The Doctor crossed under the light and took an easier chair. "You intimated you had discovered something unusual in these realms of the infinitely small," he suggested, sinking back luxuriously. "Will you tell us about it?"

"Yes, if you like," said the Chemist, turning from one to the other. A nod of assent followed his glance, as each settled himself more comfortably.

"Well, gentlemen, when you say I have discovered something unusual in another world—in the world of the infinitely small—you are right in a way. I have seen something and lost it. You won't believe me, probably." He glanced at the Banker an instant. "But that is not important. I am going to tell you the facts, just as they happened."

The Big Business Man filled up the glasses all around, and the Chemist resumed:

"It was in nineteen ten that this problem first came to interest me. I had never gone in for microscopic work very much, but now I let it absorb all my attention. I secured larger, more powerful instruments—I spent most of my money"—he smiled ruefully—"but never could I come to the end of the space into which I was looking. Something was always hidden beyond—something I could almost, but not quite, distinguish.

"Then I realized that I was on the wrong track. My instrument was not merely of insufficient power, it was not one thousandth the power I needed.

"So I began to study the laws of optics and lenses. In nineteen thirteen I went abroad, and with one of the most famous lens-makers of Europe I produced a lens of an entirely different quality, a lens that I hoped would give me what I wanted. So I returned here and fitted up my microscope that I knew would prove vastly more powerful than any yet constructed.

"It was finally completed and set up in my laboratory, and one night I went in alone to look through it for the first time. It was in the fall of nineteen fourteen, I remember.

"I can recall now my feelings at that moment. I was about to see into another world, to behold what no man had ever looked on before. What would I see? What new realms was I, first of all our human race, to enter? With furiously beating heart, I sat down before the huge instrument and carefully adjusted the eyepiece.

"Then I glanced around for some object to examine. On my finger I had a ring, my mother's wedding ring, and I decided to use that. I have it here." He took a plain gold band from his little finger and laid it on the table.

"You will see a slight mark on the outside. That is the place into which I looked."

His friends crowded around the table and examined a scratch on one side of the band.

"What did you see?" asked the Very Young Man eagerly.

"GENTLEMEN," resumed the Chemist, "what I saw staggered even my own imagination. With trembling hands I put the ring in place, looking directly down into that scratch. For a moment I saw nothing. I was like a person coming suddenly out of the sunlight into a darkened room. I knew there was something visible in my view, but my eyes did not seem able to receive the impressions. I realize now they were not yet adjusted to the new form of light. Gradually, as I looked, objects of definite shape began to emerge from the blackness.

"Gentlemen, I want to make clear to you now—as clear as I can—the peculiar aspect of everything that I saw under this microscope. I seemed to be inside an immense cave. One side, near at hand, I could now make out quite clearly. The walls were extraordinarily rough and indented, with a peculiar phosphorescent light on the projections and blackness in the hollows. I say phosphorescent light, for that is the nearest word I can find to describe it—a curious radiation, quite different from the reflected light to which we are accustomed.

"I said that the hollows inside of the cave were blackness. But not blackness—the absence of light—as we know it. It was a blackness that seemed also to radiate light, if you can imagine such a condition; a blackness that seemed not empty, but merely withholding its contents just beyond my vision.

"Except for a dim suggestion of roof

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over the cave, and its floor, I could distinguish nothing. After a moment this floor became clearer. It seemed to be—well, perhaps I might call it black marble—smooth, glossy, yet somewhat translucent. In the foreground the floor was apparently liquid. In no way did it differ in appearance from the solid part, except that its surface seemed to be in motion.

"Another curious thing was the outlines of all the shapes in view. I noticed that no outline held steady when I looked at it directly; it seemed to quiver. You see something like it when looking at an object through water—only, of course, there was no distortion. It was also like looking at something with the radiation of heat between.

"Of the back and other side of the cave, I could see nothing, except in one place, where a narrow effulgence of light drifted out into the immensity of the distance behind.

"I do not know how long I sat looking at this scene; it may have been several hours. Although I was obviously in a cave, I never felt shut in—never got the impression of being in a narrow, confined space.

"On the contrary, after a time I seemed to feel the vast immensity of the blackness before me. I think perhaps it may have been that path of light stretching out into the distance. As I looked, it seemed like the reversed tail of a comet, or the dim glow of the Milky Way, and penetrating to equally remote realms of space.

"Perhaps I fell asleep, or at least there was an interval of time during which I was so absorbed in my own thoughts I was hardly conscious of the scene before me.

"Then I became aware of a dim shape in the foreground—a shape merged with the outlines surrounding it. And as I looked, it gradually assumed form, and I saw it was the figure of a young girl, sitting beside the liquid pool. Except for the same waviness of outline and phosphorescent glow, she had quite the normal aspect of a human being of our own world. She was beautiful, according to our own standards of beauty; her long braided hair a glowing black, her face, delicate of feature and winsome in expression. Her lips were a deep red, although I felt rather than saw the color.

"She was dressed only in a short tunic of a substance I might describe as gray opaque glass, and the pearly whiteness of her skin gleamed with iridescence.

"She seemed to be singing, although I heard no sound. Once she bent over the pool and plunged her hand into it, laughing gaily.

"Gentlemen, I cannot make you appreciate my emotions, when all at once I remembered I was looking through a microscope. I had forgotten entirely my situation, absorbed in the scene before me. And then, all at once, a great realization came upon me—the realization that everything I saw was inside that ring. I was unnerved for the moment at the importance of my discovery.

"When I looked again, after the few moments my eye took to become accustomed to the new form of light, the scene showed itself as before, except that the girl had gone.

"For over a week, each night at the same time I watched that cave. The girl came always, and sat by the pool as I had first seen her. Once she danced with the wild grace of a wood nymph, whirling in and out the shadows, and falling at last in a little heap beside the pool.

"It was on the tenth night after I had first seen her that the accident happened. I had been watching, I remember, an unusually long time before she appeared, gliding out of the shadows. She

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seemed in a different mood, pensive and sad, as she bent down over the pool, staring into it intently. Suddenly there was a tremendous cracking sound, sharp as an explosion, and I was thrown backward upon the floor.

"WHEN I recovered consciousness—I must have struck my head on something—I found the microscope in ruins. Upon examination I saw that its larger lens had exploded—flown into fragments scattered around the room. Why I was not killed I do not understand. The ring I picked up from the floor; it was unharmed and unchanged in any way.

"Can I make you understand how I felt at this loss? Because of the war in Europe I knew I could never replace my lens—for many years, at any rate. And then, gentlemen, came the most terrible feeling of all; I knew at last that the scientific achievement I had made and lost counted for little with me. It was the girl. I realized then that the only being I ever could care for was living out her life with her world, and, indeed, her whole universe, inside an atom of that ring."

The Chemist stopped talking and looked from one to the other of the tense faces of his companions.

"It's almost too big an idea to grasp," murmured the Doctor.

"What caused the explosion?" asked the Very Young Man.

"I do not know." The Chemist addressed his reply to the Doctor, as the most understanding of the group. "I can appreciate, though, that through that lens I was magnifying tremendously those peculiar light-radiatons that I have described. I believe the molecules of the lens were shattered by them—I had exposed it longer to them that evening than any of the others."

The Doctor nodded his comprehension of this theory.

Impressed in spite of himself, the Banker took another drink and leaned forward in his chair. "Then you really think that there is a girl now inside the gold of that ring?" he asked.

"He didn't say that necessarily," interrupted the Big Business Man.

"Yes, he did."

"As a matter of fact, I do believe that to be the case," said the Chemist earnestly. "I believe that every particle of matter in our universe contains within it an equally complex and complete a universe, which to its inhabitants seem as large as ours. I think, also, that the whole realm of our interplanetary space, our solar system and all the remote stars of the heavens are contained within the atom of some other universe as gigantic to us as we are to the universe in that ring."

"Gosh!" said the Very Young Man.

"It doesn't make one feel very important in the scheme of things, does it?" remarked the Big Business Man dryly.

The Chemist smiled. "The existence of no individual, no nation, no world, nor any one universe is of the least importance."

"Then it would be possible," said the Doctor, "for this gigantic universe that contains us in one of its atoms, to be itself contained within the atom of another universe, still more gigantic than it is, and so on."

"That is my own theory," said the Chemist.

"And in each of the atoms of the rocks of that cave there may be other worlds proportionately minute?"

"I can see no reason to doubt it."

"Well, there is no proof, anyway," said the Banker. "We might as well believe it."

"I intend to get the proof," said the Chemist.

"Do you believe all these innumerable universes, both larger and smaller than ours, are inhabited?" the Doctor asked him.

"I should think probably most of them are. The existence of life, I believe, is as fundamental as the existence of matter without life."

"How do you suppose that girl got in there?" asked the Very Young Man, coming out of a brown study.

"What puzzled me," resumed the Chemist, ignoring the question, "is why the girl should so resemble our own race. I have thought about it a good deal, and I have reached the conclusion that the inhabitants of any universe in the next smaller or larger plane to ours probably resemble us fairly closely. That ring, you see, is in the same—shall we say—environment as ourselves. The same forces control it that control us. Now, if the ring had been created on Mars, for instance, I believe that the universes within its atoms would be inhabited by beings like the Martians—if Mars has any inhabitants. Of course, in planes beyond those next to ours, either smaller or larger, changes would probably

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occur, becoming greater as you go in or out from our own universe."

"Good Lord! It makes one dizzy to think of it," said the Big Business Man excitedly.

"I wish I knew how that girl got in there," sighed the Very Young Man, looking at the ring.

'She probably didn't," retorted the Doctor. "Very likely she was created there, the same as you were here."

"I think that is probably so," said the Chemist. "And yet, sometimes I am not at all sure. She was very human." The Very Young Man looked at him sympathetically.

"How are you going to prove your theories?" asked the Banker, in his most irritatingly practical way.

The Chemist picked up the ring and put it on his finger. "Gentlemen," he said, "I have tried to tell you facts, not theories. What I saw through that ultramicroscope was not an unproven theory, but a fact. My theories you have brought out by your questions."

"You are quite right," said the Doctor, "but you did mention yourself that you hoped to provide proof."

The Chemist hesitated a moment, then made his decision. "I will tell you the rest," he said.

"After the destruction of the microscope, I was quite at a loss how to proceed. I thought about the problem for many weeks. Finally I decided to work along another altogether different line—a theory about which I am surprised you have not already questioned me."

He paused, but no one spoke.

"I am hardly ready with proof tonight," he resumed after a moment. "Will you all take dinner with me here at the club one week from to-night?" He read affirmation in the glance of each.

"Good. That's settled," he said rising. "At seven, then."

"But what was the theory you expected us to question you about?" asked the Very Young Man.

The Chemist leaned on the back of his chair.

"The only solution I could see to the problem," he said slowly, "was to find some way of making myself sufficiently small to be able to enter that other universe. I have found such a way, and one week from to-night, gentlemen, with your assistance, I am going to enter the surface of that ring at the point where it is scratched!"

CHAPTER II

INTO THE RING

THE cigars were lighted and dinner over before the Doctor broached the subject uppermost in the minds of every member of the party.

"A toast, gentlemen," he said, raising his glass. "To the greatest research Chemist in the world. May he be successful in his adventure to-night."

The Chemist bowed his acknowledgment.

"You have not heard me yet," he said smiling.

"But we want to," said the Very Young Man impulsively.

"And you shall." He settled himself more comfortably in his chair. "Gentlemen, I am going to tell you, first, as simply as possible, just what I have done in the past two years. You must draw your own conclusions from the evidence I give you.

"You will remember that I told you last week of my dilemma after the destruction of the microscope. Its loss and the impossibility of replacing it, led me into still bolder plans than merely the visual examination of this minute world. I reasoned, as I have told you, that because of its physical proximity, its similar environment, so to speak, this outer world should be capable of supporting life identical with our own.

"By no process of reasoning can I find adequate refutation of this theory. Then, again, I had the evidence of my own eyes to prove that a being I could not tell from one of my own kind was living there. That this girl, other than in size, differs radically from those of our race, I cannot believe.

"I saw then but one obstacle standing between me and this other world—the discrepancy of size. The distance separating our world from this other, is infinitely great or infinitely small, according to the viewpoint. In my present size it is only a few feet from here to the ring on that plate. But to an inhabitant of that other world, we are as remote as the faintest stars of the heavens, diminished a thousand times."

He paused a moment, signing the waiter to leave the room.

"This reduction of bodily size, great as it is, involves no deeper principle than does a light contraction of tissue, except that it must be carried further. The problem, then, was to find a chemical,

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sufficiently unharmful to life, that would so act upon the body cells as to cause a reduction in bulk, without changing their shape. I had to secure a uniform and also a proportionate rate of contraction of each cell, in order not to have the body shape altered.

"After a comparatively small amount of research work, I encountered an apparently insurmountable obstacle. As you know, gentlemen, our living human bodies are held together by the power of the central intelligence we call the mind. Every instant during your lifetime your subconscious mind is commanding and directing the individual life of each cell that makes up your body. At death this power is withdrawn; each cell is thrown under its own individual command, and dissolution of the body takes place.

"I found, therefore, that I could not act upon the cells separately, so long as they were under control of the mind. On the other hand, I could not withdraw this power of the subconscious mind without causing death.

"I progressed no further than this for several months. Then came the solution. I reasoned that after death the body does not immediately disintegrate; far more time elapses than I expected to need for the cell-contraction. I devoted my time, then, to finding a chemical that would temporarily withhold, during the period of cell-contraction, the power of the subconscious mind, just as the power of the conscious mind is withheld by hypnotism.

"I AM not going to weary you by trying to lead you through the maze of chemical experiments into which I plunged. Only one of you"—he indicated the Doctor—"has the technical bases of knowledge to follow me. No one had been before me along the path I traversed. I pursued the method of pure theoretical deduction, drawing my conclusions from the practical results obtained.

"I worked on rabbits almost exclusively. After a few weeks I succeeded in completely suspending animation in one of them for several hours. There was no life apparently existing during that period. It was not a trance or coma, but the complete simulation of death. No harmful results followed the revivifying of the animal. The contraction of the cells was far more difficult to accomplish; I finished my last experiment less than six months ago."

"Then you really have been able to make an animal infinitely small?" asked the Big Business Man.

The Chemist smiled. "I sent four rabbits into the unknown last week," he said.

"What did they look like going?" asked the Very Young Man. The Chemist signed him to be patient.

"The quantity of diminution to be obtained bothered me considerably. Exactly how small that other universe is, I had no means of knowing, except by the computations I made of the magnifying power of my lens. These figures, I know, must necessarily be very inaccurate. Then, again, I have no means of judging by the visual rate of diminution of these rabbits, whether this contraction is at a uniform rate or accelerated. Nor can I tell how long it is prolonged, or the quantity of drug administered, as only a fraction of the diminution has taken place when the animal passes beyond the range of any microscope I now possess.

"These questions were overshadowed, however, by a far more serious problem that encompassed them all.

"As I was planning to project myself into this unknown universe and to reach the exact size proportionate to it, I soon realized such a result could not be obtained were I in an unconscious state. Only by successive doses of the drug, or its retardant about which I will tell you later, could I hope to reach the proper size. Another necessity is that I place myself on the exact spot on that ring where I wish to enter and to climb down among its atoms when I have become sufficiently small to do so. Obviously, this would be impossible to one not possessing all his faculties and physical strength."

"And did you solve that problem, too?" asked the Banker. "I'd like to see it done," he added, reading his answer in the other's confident smile.

The Chemist produced two small paper packages from his wallet. "These drugs are the result of my research," he said. "One of them causes contraction, and the other expansion, by an exact reversal of the process. Taken together, they produce no effect, and a lesser amount of one retards the action of the other." He opened the papers, showing two small vials. "I have made them as you see, in the form of tiny pills, each containing a minute quantity of the drug. It is by taking them successively in unequal amounts that I expect to reach the desired size."

"There's one point that you do not

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mention," said the Doctor. "Those vials and their contents will have to change size as you do. How are you going to manage that?"

"By experimentation I have found," answered the Chemist, "that any object held in close physical contact with the living body being contracted is contracted itself at an equal rate. I believe that my clothes will be affected also. These vials I will carry strapped under my armpits."

"Suppose you should die, or be killed, would the contraction cease?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes, almost immediately," replied the Chemist. "Apparently, though I am acting through the subconscious mind while its power is held in abeyance, when this power is permanently withdrawn by death, the drug no longer effects the individual cells. The contraction or expansion ceases almost at once."

The Chemist cleared a space before him on the table. "In a well-managed club like this," he said, "there should be no flies, but I see several around. Do you suppose we can catch one of them?"

"I can," said the Very Young Man, and forthwith he did.

The Chemist moistened a lump of sugar and laid it on the table before him. Then, selecting one of the smallest of the pills, he ground it to powder with the back of a spoon and sprinkled this powder on the sugar.

"Will you give me the fly, please?"

The Very Young Man gingerly did so. The Chemist held the insect by its wings over the sugar. "Will some one lend me one of his shoes?"

The Very Young Man hastily slipped off one of his shoes.

"Thank you," said the Chemist, placing it on the table with a quizzical smile.

The rest of the company rose from their chairs and gathered around, watching with interested faces what was about to happen.

"I hope he is hungry," remarked the Chemist, and placed the fly gently down on the sugar, still holding it by the wings. The insect, after a moment, ate a little.

Silence fell upon the group as each watched intently. For a few moments nothing happened. Then, almost imperceptibly at first, the fly became larger. In another minute it was the size of a large horse-fly, struggling to release its wings from the Chemist's grasp. A minute more and it was the size of a beetle. No one spoke. The Banker moistened his lips, drained his glass hurriedly and moved slightly farther away. Still the insect grew; now it was the size of a small chicken, the multiple lens of its eyes presenting a most terrifying aspect, while its ferocious droning reverberated through the room. Then suddenly the Chemist threw it upon the table, covered it with a napkin, and beat it violently with the shoe. When all movement had ceased he tossed its quivering body into a corner of the room.

"GOOD God!" ejaculated the Banker, as the white-faced men stared at each other. The quiet voice of the Chemist brought them back to themselves. "That, gentlemen, you must understand, was only a fraction of the very first stage of growth. As you may have noticed, it was constantly accelerated. This acceleration attains a speed of possibly fifty thousand times that you observed. Beyond that, it is my theory, the change is at a uniform rate." He looked at the body of the fly, lying inert on the floor. "You can appreciate now, gentlemen, the im-

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portance of having this growth cease after death."

"Good Lord, I should say so!" murmured the Big Business Man, mopping his forehead. The Chemist took the lump of sugar and threw it into the open fire.

"Gosh!" said the Very Young Man. "Suppose when we were not looking, another fly had—"

"Shut up!" growled the Banker.

"Not so skeptical now, eh, George?" said the Big Business Man.

"Can you catch me another fly?" asked the Chemist. The Very young Man hastened to do so. "The second demonstration, gentlemen," said the Chemist, "is less spectacular, but far more pertinent than the one you have just witnessed." He took the fly by the wings, and prepared another lump of sugar, sprinkling a crushed pill from the other vial upon it.

"When he is small enough I am going to try to put him on the ring, if he will stay still," said the Chemist.

The Doctor pulled the plate containing the ring forward until it was directly under the light, and everyone crowded closer to watch; already the fly was almost too small to be held. The Chemist tried to set it on the ring, but could not; so with his other hand he brushed it lightly into the plate, where it lay, a tiny black speck against the gleaming whiteness of the china.

"Watch it carefully, gentlemen," he said as they bent closer.

"It's gone," said the Big Business Man.

"No, I can still see it," said the Doctor. Then he raised the plate closer to his face. "Now it's gone," he said.

The Chemist sat down in his chair. "It's probably still there, only too small for you to see. In a few minutes, if it took a sufficient amount of the drug, it will be small enough to fall between the molecules of the plate."

"Do you suppose it will find another inhabited universe down there?" asked the Very Young Man.

"Who knows," said the Chemist. "Very possibly it will. But the one we are interested in is here," he added, touching the ring.

"Is it your intention to take this stuff yourself, to-night?" asked the Big Business Man.

"If you will give me your help, I think so, yes. I have made all arrangements. The club has given us this room in absolute privacy for forty-eight hours. Your meals will be served here when you want them, and I am going to ask you, gentlemen, to take turns watching and guarding the ring during that time. Will you do it?"

"I should say we would!" cried the Doctor, and the others nodded assent.

"It is because I wanted you to be convinced of my entire sincerity that I have taken you so thoroughly into my confidence. Are those doors locked?" The Very Young Man locked them.

"Thank you," said the Chemist, starting to disrobe. In a moment he stood before them attired in a woolen bathing-suit of pure white. Over his shoulders was strapped tightly a narrow leather harness, supporting two silken pockets, one under each armpit. Into each of these he placed one of the vials, first laying four pills from one of them upon the table.

At this point the Banker rose from his chair and selected another in the farther corner of the room. He sank into it a crumpled heap and wiped the beads of perspiration from his face with a shaking hand.

"I have every expectation," said the Chemist, "that this suit and harness will contract in size uniformly with me. If the harness should not, then I shall have to hold the vials in my hand."

On the table, directly under the light, he spread a large silk handkerchief, upon which he placed the ring. He then produced a teaspoon, which he handed to the Doctor.

"Please listen carefully," he said, "for perhaps the whole success of my adventure, and my life itself, may depend upon your actions during the next few minutes. You will realize, of course, that when I am still large enough to be visible to you, I shall be so small that my voice may be inaudible. Therefore, I want you to know, now, just what to expect.

"When I am something under a foot high, I shall step upon that handkerchief, where you will see my white suit plainly against its black surface. When I become less than an inch in height, I shall run over to the ring and stand beside it. When I have diminished to about a quarter of an inch, I shall climb upon it, and, as I get smaller, will follow its surface until I come to the scratch.

"I WANT you to watch me very closely. I may miscalculate the time and wait until I am too small to climb upon the ring. Or I may fall off. In either case, you will place that spoon beside me and I

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will climb into it. You will then do your best to help me get on the ring. Is all this quite clear?"

The Doctor nodded assent.

"Very well, watch me as long as I remain visible. If I have an accident, I shall take the other drug and endeavor to return to you at once. This you must expect at any moment during the next forty-eight hours. Under all circumstances, if I am alive, I shall return at the expiration of that time.

"And, gentlemen, let me caution you most solemnly, do not allow that ring to be touched until that length of time has expired. Can I depend on you?"

"Yes," they answered breathlessly.

"After I have taken the pills," the Chemist continued, "I shall not speak unless it is absolutely necessary. I do not know what my sensations will be, and I want to follow them as closely as possible." He then turned out all the lights in the room with the exception of the center electrolier, that shone down directly on the handkerchief and ring.

The Chemist looked about him. "Good-by, gentlemen," he said, shaking hands all around. "Wish me luck." And without hesitation he placed the four pills in his mouth and washed them down with a swallow of water.

Silence fell on the group as the Chemist seated himself and covered his face with his hands. For perhaps two minutes the tenseness of the silence was unbroken, save by the heavy breathing of the Banker as he lay huddled in his chair.

"Oh, my God! He *is* growing smaller!" whispered the Big Business Man in a horrified tone to the Doctor. The Chemist raised his head and smiled at them. Then he stood up, steadying himself against a chair. He was less than four feet high. Steadily he grew smaller before their horrified eyes. Once he made as if to speak, and the Doctor knelt down beside him. "It's all right, good-by," he said in a tiny voice.

Then he stepped upon the handkerchief. The Doctor knelt on the floor beside it, the wooden spoon ready in his hand, while the others, except the Banker, stood behind him. The figure of the Chemist, standing motionless near the edge of the handkerchief, seemed now like a little white wooden toy, hardly more than one inch in height.

Waving his hand and smiling, he suddenly started to walk and then ran swiftly over to the ring. By the time he reached it, somewhat out of breath, he was little more than twice as high as the width of its band. Without pausing, he leaped up, and sat astraddle, leaning over and holding to it tightly with his hands. In another moment he was on his feet, on the upper edge of the ring, walking carefully along its circumference toward the scratch.

The Big Business Man touched the Doctor on the shoulder and tried to smile. "He's making it," he whispered. As if in answer the little figure turned and waved its arms. They could just distinguish its white outline against the gold surface underneath.

"I don't see him," said the Very Young Man in a scared voice.

"He's right near the scratch," answered the Doctor, bending closer. Then, after a moment, "He's gone." He rose to his feet. "Good Lord! Why haven't we a microscope!" he added.

"I never thought of that," said the Big Business Man. "We could have watched him for a long time yet."

"Well, he's gone now," returned the Doctor, "and there is nothing for us to do but wait."

"I hope he finds that girl," sighed the Very Young Man, as he sat chin in hand beside the handkerchief.

THE Banker snored stertorously from his mattress in a corner of the room. In an easy-chair near by, with his feet on the table, lay the Very Young Man, sleeping also.

The Doctor and the Big Business Man sat by the handkerchief conversing in low tones.

"How long has it been now?" asked the latter.

"Just forty hours," answered the Doctor, "and he said that forty-eight hours was the limit. He should come back at about ten to-night."

"I wonder if he *will* come back," questioned the Big Business Man nervously. "Lord, I wish *he* wouldn't snore so loud," he added irritably, nodding in the direction of the Banker.

They were silent for a moment, and then he went on: "You'd better try to sleep awhile," he said to the Doctor. "You're worn out. I'll watch here."

"I suppose I should," answered the Doctor wearily. "Wake up that kid; he's sleeping most of the time."

"No, I'll watch," repeated the Big Business Man; " you lie down over there."

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The Doctor did so while the other settled himself more comfortably on a cushion beside the handkerchief, and prepared for his lonely watching.

The Doctor apparently dropped off to sleep at once, for he did not speak again. The Big Business Man sat staring steadily at the ring, bending nearer to it occasionally. Every ten or fifteen minutes he looked at his watch.

Perhaps an hour passed in this way, when the Very Young Man suddenly sat up and yawned. "Haven't they come back yet?" he asked in a sleepy voice.

The Big Business Man answered in a much lower tone. "What do you mean—they?" he said.

"I dreamed that he brought the girl back with him," said the Very Young Man.

"Well, if he did, they have not arrived," answered the Big Business Man. "You'd beter go back to sleep. We've got six or seven hours yet."

The Very Young Man rose and crossed the room. "No, I'll watch awhile," he said, seating himself on the floor. "What time is it?"

"Quarter of three."

"He said he'd be back by ten to-night. I'm crazy to see that girl."

The Big Business Man rose and went over to a dinner-tray, standing near the door. "Lord, I'm hungry. I must have forgotten to eat to-day." He lifted up one of the silver covers. What he saw evidently encouraged him, for he drew up a chair and began his lunch.

The Very Young Man lighted a cigarette. "It will be the tragedy of my life," he said, "if he never comes back."

The Big Business Man smiled. "How about *his* life?" he answered, but the Very Young man had fallen into a reverie and did not reply.

The Big Business Man finished his lunch in silence and was just about to light a cigar when a sharp exclamation brought him hastily to his feet.

"Come here, quick, I see something." The Very Young Man had his face close to the ring and was trembling violently.

The other pushed him back. "Let me see. Where?"

"There by the scratch; he's lying there; I can see him."

The Big Business Man looked and then hurriedly woke the Doctor.

"He's come back," he said briefly; "you can see him there." The Doctor bent down over the ring while the others woke up the Banker.

"He doesn't seem to be getting any bigger," said the Very Young Man; "he's just lying there. Maybe he's dead."

"What shall we do?" asked the Big Business Man, and made as if to pick up the ring. The Doctor shoved him away. "Don't do that!" he said sharply. "Do you want to kill him?"

"He's sitting up," cried the Very Young Man. "He's all right."

"He must have fainted," said the Doctor. "Probably he's taking more of the drug now."

"He's much larger," said the Very Young Man; "look at him!"

The tiny figure was sitting sidewise on the ring, with its feet hanging over the outer edge. It was growing perceptibly larger each instant, and in a moment it slipped down off the ring and sank in a heap on the handkerchief.

"Good Heavens! Look at him!" cried the Big Business Man. "He's all covered with blood."

The little figure presented a ghastly sight. As it steadily grew larger they could see and recognize the Chemist's haggard face, his cheek and neck stained with blood, and his white suit covered with dirt.

"Look at his feet," whispered the Big Business Man. They were horribly cut and bruised and greatly swollen.

The Doctor bent over and whispered gently, "What can I do to help you?" The Chemist shook his head. His body, lying prone upon the handkerchief, had torn it apart in growing. When he was about twelve inches in length he raised his head. The Doctor bent closer. "Some brandy, please," said a wraith of the Chemist's voice. It was barely audible.

"He wants some brandy," called the Doctor. The Very Young Man looked hastily around, then opened the door and dashed madly out of the room. When he returned, the Chemist had grown to nearly four feet. He was sitting on the floor with his back against the Doctor's knees. The Big Business Man was wiping the blood off his face with a damp napkin.

"Here!" cried the Very Young Man, thrusting forth the brandy. The Chemist drank a little of it. Then he sat up, evidently somewhat revived.

"I seem to have stopped growing," he said. "Let's finish it up now. God! How I want to be the right size again," he added fervently.

The Doctor helped him extract the vials from under his arm, and the Chemist

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touched one of the pills to his tongue. Then he sank back, closing his eyes. "I think that should be about enough," he murmured.

NO ONE spoke for nearly ten minutes. Gradually the Chemist's body grew, the Doctor shifting his position several times as it became larger. It seemed finally to have stopped growing, and was apparently nearly its former size.

"Is he asleep?" whispered the Very Young Man.

The Chemist opened his eyes.

"No," he answered. "I'm all right now, I think." He rose to his feet, the Doctor and the Big Business Man supporting him on either side.

"Sit down and tell us about it," said the Very Young Man. "Did you find the girl?"

The Chemist smiled wearily.

"Gentlemen, I cannot talk now. Let me have a bath and some dinner. Then I will tell you all about it."

The Doctor rang for an attendant, and led the Chemist to the door, throwing a blanket around him as he did so. In the doorway the Chemist paused and looked back, with a wan smile, over the wreck of the room.

"Give me an hour," he said. "And eat something yourselves while I am gone." Then he left, closing the door after him.

When he returned, fully dressed in clothes that were ludicrously large for him, the room had been straightened up, and his four friends were finishing their meal. He took his place among them quietly and lighted a cigar.

"Well, gentlemen, I suppose that you are interested to hear what happened to me," he began. The Very Young Man asked his usual question.

"Let him alone," said the Doctor.

"Was it all as you expected?" asked the Banker.

It was his first remark since the Chemist returned.

"To a great extent, yes," answered the Chemist. "But I had better tell you just what happened." The Very Young Man nodded his eager agreement.

"When I took those first four pills," began the Chemist in a quiet, even tone, "my immediate sensation was a sudden reeling of the senses, combined with an extreme nausea. This latter feeling passed after a moment.

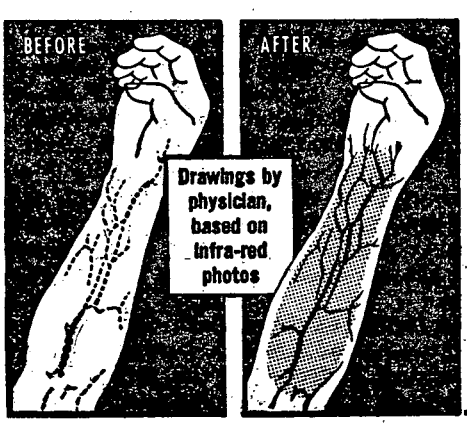
"You will remember that I seated myself upon the floor and closed my eyes. When I opened them my head had steadied itself somewhat, but I was oppressed by a curious feeling of drowsiness, impossible to shake off.

"My first mental impression was one of wonderment when I saw you all begin to increase in size. I remember standing up beside the chair, which was then half again its normal size, and you"—indicating the Doctor—"towered beside me as a giant of nine or ten feet high.

"Steadily upward, with a curious crawling motion, grew the room and all its contents. Except for the feeling of sleep that oppressed me, I felt quite my usual self. No change appeared happening to me, but everything else seemed growing to gigantic and terrifying proportions.

"Can you imagine a human being a hundred feet high? That is how you looked to me as I stepped upon that huge expanse of black silk and shouted my last good-by to you!

"Over to my left lay the ring, apparently fifteen or twenty feet away. I started to walk toward it, but although it grew rapidly larger, the distance separating me from it seemed to increase rather than



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lessen. Then I ran, and by the time I arrived it stood higher than my waist—a beautiful, shaggy, golden pit.

"I jumped upon its rim and clung to it tightly. I could feel it growing beneath me as I sat. After a moment I climbed upon its top surface and started to walk toward the point where I knew the scratch to be.

"I found myself now, as I looked about, walking upon a narrow, though ever broadening, curved path. The ground beneath my feet appeared to be a rough, yellowish quartz. This path grew rougher as I advanced. Below the bulging edges of the path, on both sides, lay a shining black plain, ridged and indented, and with a sunlike sheen on the higher portions of the ridges. On the one hand this black plain stretched in an unbroken expanse to the horizon. On the other, it appeared as a circular valley, enclosed by a shining yellow wall.

"The way had now become extraordinarily rough. I bore to the left as I advanced, keeping close to outer edge. The other edge of the path I could not see. I clambered along hastily, and after a few moments was confronted by a row of rocks and boulders lying directly across my line of progress. I followed their course for a short distance, and finally found a space through which I could pass.

"This transverse ridge was perhaps a hundred feet deep. Behind it and extending in a parallel direction lay a tremendous valley. I knew then I had reached my first objective.

"I sat down upon the brink of the precipice and watched the cavern growing ever wider and deeper. Then I realized that I must begin my descent if ever I was to reach the bottom. For perhaps six hours I climbed steadily downward. It was a fairly easy descent after the first little while, for the ground seemed to open up before me as I advanced, changing its contour so constantly that I was never at a loss for an easy downward path.

"My feet suffered cruelly from the shaggy, metallic ground, and I soon had to stop and rig a sort of protection for the soles from a portion of the harness over my shoulder. According to the stature I was when I reached the bottom, I had descended perhaps twelve thousand feet during this time.

"The latter part of this journey found me nearing the bottom of the cañon. Objects around me no longer seemed to increase in size, as had been constantly the case before, and I reasoned that probably my stature was remaining constant.

"I noticed, too, as I advanced, a curious alteration in the form of light around me. The glare from above (the sky showed only a narrow dull ribbon of blue) barely penetrated to the depths of the cañon's floor. But all about me there was a soft radiance, seeming to emanate from the rocks themselves.

"THE SIDES of the cañon were shaggy and rough, beyond anything I had ever seen. Huge boulders, hundreds of feet in diameter, were imbedded in them. The bottom also was strewn with similar gigantic rocks.

"I surveyed this lonely waste for some time in dismay, not knowing in what direction lay my goal. I knew that I was at the bottom of the scratch, and by the comparison of its size I realized I was well started on my journey.

"I have not told you, gentlemen, that at the time I marked the ring I made a deeper indentation in one portion of the scratch and focused the microscope upon that. This indentation I now searched for. Luckily I found it, less than half a mile away—an almost circular pit, perhaps five miles in diameter, with shining walls extending downward into blackness. There seemed no possible way of descending into it, so I sat down near its edge to think out my plan of action.

"I realized now that I was faint and hungry, and whatever I did must be done quickly. I could turn back to you, or I could go on. I decided to risk the latter course, and took twelve more of the pills—three times my original dose."

The Chemist paused for a moment, but his auditors were much too intent to question him. Then he resumed in his former matter-of-fact tone.

"After my vertigo had passed somewhat—it was much more severe this time—I looked up and found my surroundings growing at a far more rapid rate than before. I staggered to the edge of the pit. It was opening up and widening out at an astounding rate. Already its sides were becoming rough and broken, and I saw many places where a descent would be possible.

"The feeling of sleep that had formerly merely oppressed me, combined now with my physical fatigue and the larger dose of the drug I had taken, became almost

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intolerable. I yielded to it for a moment, lying down on a crag near the edge of the pit. I must have became almost immediately unconscious, and remained so for a considerable time. I can remember a horrible sensation of sliding headlong for what seemed like hours. I felt that I was sliding or falling downward. I tried to rouse but could not. Then came absolute oblivion.

"When I recovered my senses I was lying partly covered by a mass of smooth, shining pebbles. I was bruised and battered from head to foot—in a far worse condition than you first saw me in when I returned.

"I sat up and looked around. Beside me, sloped upward at an apparently increasing angle, a tremendous glossy plane. This extended, as far as I could see, both to the right and left and upward into the blackness of the sky overhead. It was this plane that had evidently broken my fall, and I had been sliding down it, bringing with me a considerable mass of rocks and boulders.

"As my senses became clearer I saw I was lying on a fairly level floor. I could see perhaps two miles in each direction. Beyond that there was only darkness. The sky overhead was unbroken by stars or light of any kind. I should have been in total darkness except, as I have told you before, that everything, even the blackness itself, seemed to be self-luminous.

"The incline down which I had fallen was composed of some smooth substance suggesting black marble. The floor underfoot was quite different—more of a metallic quality with a curious corrugation. Before me, in the dim distance, I could just make out a tiny range of hills.

"I rose, after a time, and started weakly to walk toward these hills. Though I was faint and dizzy from my fall and the lack of food, I walked for perhaps half an hour, following closely the edge of the incline. No change in my visual surroundings occurred, except that I seemed gradually to be approaching the line of hills. My situation at this time, as I turned it over in my mind, appeared hopelessly desperate, and I admit I neither expected to reach my destination nor to be able to return to my own world.

"A sudden change in the feeling of the ground underfoot brought me to myself; I bent down and found I was treading on vegetation—a tiny forest extending for quite a distance in front and to the side of me. A few steps ahead a little silver ribbon threaded its way through the trees. This I judged to be water.

"New hope possessed me at this discovery. I sat down at once and took a portion of another of the pills.

"I must again have fallen asleep. When I awoke, somewhat refreshed, I found myself lying beside the huge trunk of a fallen tree. I was in what had evidently once been a deep forest, but which now was almost utterly desolated. Only here and there were the trees left standing. For the most part they were lying in a crushed and tangled mass, many of them partially embedded in the ground.

"I cannot express adequately to you, gentlemen, what an evidence of tremendous superhuman power this scene presented. No storm, no lightning, nor any attack of the elements could have produced more than a fraction of the destruction I saw all around me.

"I climbed cautiously upon the fallen tree-trunk, and from this elevation had a much better view of my surroundings. I appeared to be near one end of the desolated area, which extended in a path about half a mile wide and several miles deep. In front, a thousand feet away, perhaps, lay the unbroken forest.

"Descending from the tree-trunk I walked in this direction, reaching the edge of the woods after possibly an hour of the most arduous traveling of my whole journey.

"During this time almost my only thought was the necessity of obtaining food. I looked about me as I advanced, and on one of the fallen tree-trunks I found a sort of vine growing. This vine bore a profusion of small gray berries, much like our huckleberries. They proved similar in taste, and I sat down and ate a quantity.

"When I reached the edge of the forest I felt somewhat stronger. I had seen up to this time no sign of animal life whatever. Now, as I stood silent, I could hear around me all the multitudinous tiny voices of the woods. Insect life stirred underfoot, and in the trees above an occasional bird flitted to and fro.

"Perhaps I am giving you a picture of our own world. I do not mean to do so. You must remember that above me there was no sky, just blackness. And yet so much light illuminated the scene that I could not believe it was other than what we would call daytime. Objects in the forest were as well lighted—better probably than they would be under similar

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circumstances in our own familiar world.

"The trees were of huge size compared to my present stature: straight, upstanding trunks, with no branches until very near the top. They were bluish-gray in color, and many of them well covered with the berry-vine I have mentioned. The leaves overhead seemed to be blue—in fact the predominating color of all the vegetation was blue, just as in our world it is green. The ground was covered with dead leaves, mold, and a sort of a gray moss. Fungus of a similar color appeared, but of this I did not eat.

"I had penetrated perhaps two miles into the forest when I came unexpectedly to the bank of a broad, smooth-flowing river, its silver surface seeming to radiate waves of the characteristic phosphorescent light. I found it cold, pure-tasting water, and I drank long and deeply. Then I remember lying down upon the mossy bank, and in a moment, utterly worn out, I again fell asleep."

CHAPTER III

LYLDA

"I WAS awakened by the feel of soft hands upon my head and face. With a start I sat up abruptly; I rubbed my eyes confusedly for a moment, not knowing where I was. When I collected my wits I found myself staring into the face of a girl, who was kneeling on the ground before me. I recognized her at once—she was the girl of the microscope.

"To say I was startled would be to put it mildly, but I read no fear in her expression, only wonderment at my springing so suddenly into life. She was dressed very much as I had seen her before. Her fragile beauty was the same, and at this closer view infinitely more appealing, but I was puzzled to account for her older, more mature look. She seemed to have aged several years since the last evening I had seen her through the microscope. Yet, undeniably, it was the same girl.

"For some moments we sat looking at each other in wonderment. Then she smiled and held out her hand, palm up, speaking a few words as she did so. Her voice was soft and musical, and the words of a peculiar quality that we generally describe as liquid, for want of a better term. What she said was wholly unintelligible, but whether the words were strange or the intonation different from anything I knew, I could not tell.

"Afterward, during my stay in this other world, I found that the language of its people resembled English quite closely, so far as the words themselves went. But the intonation with which they were given, and the gestures accompanying them, differed so widely from our own that they conveyed no meaning.

"The gap separating us, however, was very much less than you would imagine. Strangely enough, though, it was not I who learned to speak her tongue, but she who mastered mine."

The Very Young Man sighed contentedly.

"We became quite friendly after this greeting," resumed the Chemist, "and it was apparent from her manner that she had already conceived her own idea of who and what I was.

"For some time we sat and tried to communicate with each other. My words seemed almost as unintelligible to her as hers to me, except that occasionally she would divine my meannig, clapping her hands in childish delight. I made out that she lived at a considerable distance, and that her name was Lylda. Finally she pulled me by the hand and led me away with a proprietary air that amused, and, I must admit to you, pleased me tremendously.

"We had progressed through the woods in this way, hardly more than a few hundred yards, when suddenly I found that she was taking me into the mouth of a cave or passageway, sloping downward at an angle of perhaps twenty degrees. I noticed now, more graphically than ever before, a truth that had been gradually forcing itself upon me. Darkness was impossible in this new world. We were now shut in between narrow walls of crystalline rock, with a roof hardly more than fifty feet above.

"No artificial light of any kind was in evidence, yet the scene was lighted quite brightly. This, I have explained, was caused by the phosphorescent radiation that apparently emanated from every particle of mineral matter in this universe.

"As we advanced, many other tunnels crossed the one we were traveling. And now, occasionally, we passed other people, the men dressed similarly to Lylda, but wearing their hair chopped off just above the shoulder line.

"Later, I found that the men were generally about five and a half feet in stature: lean, muscular, and with a grayer,

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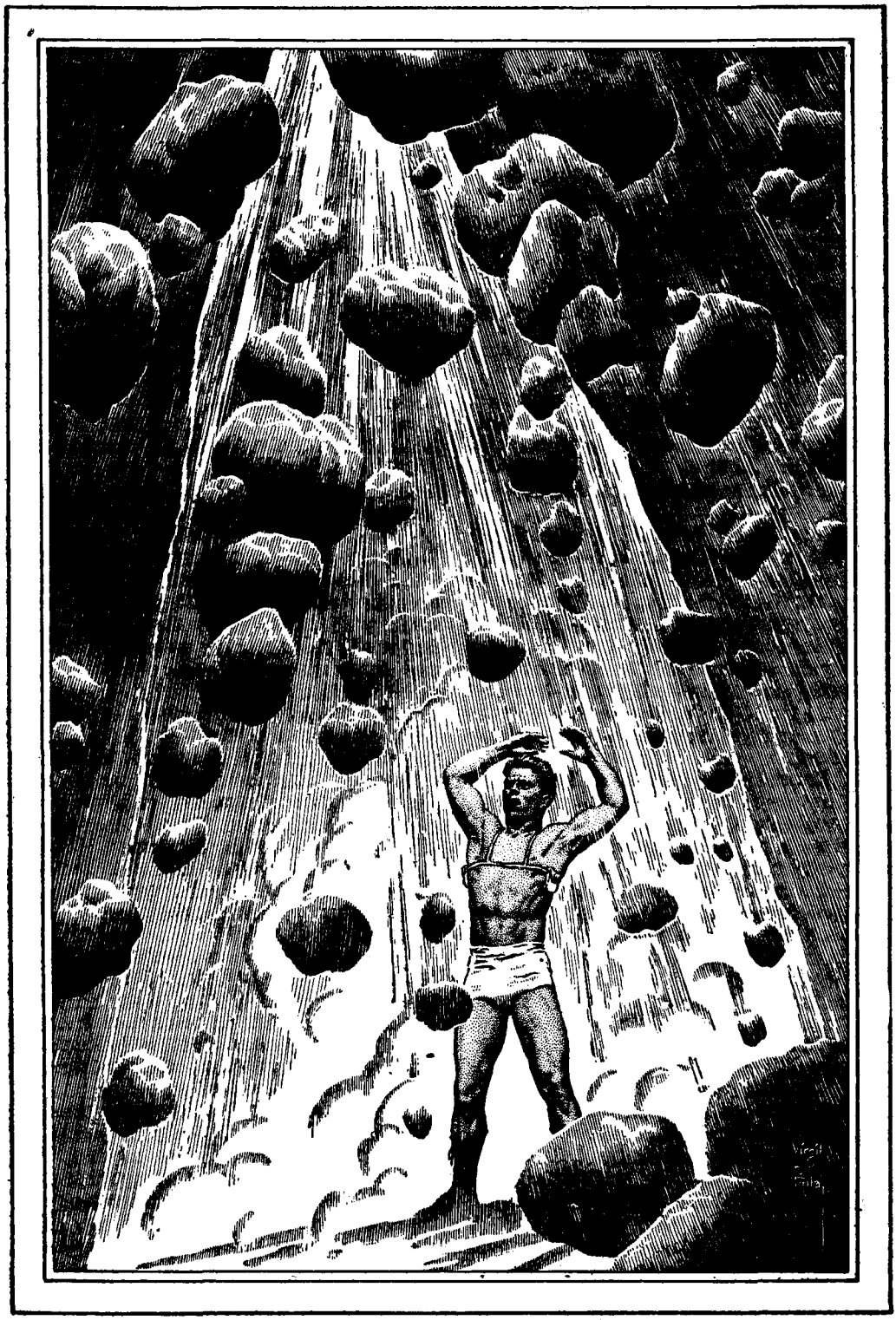

In every direction towered this rocky wall, inexorably swaying in to crush me.

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harder look to their skin than the iridescent quality that characterized the women.

"They were fine-looking chaps these we encountered. All of them stared curiously at me, and several times we were held up by chattering groups. The intense whiteness of my skin, for it looked in this light the color of chalk, seemed to both awe and amuse them. But they treated me with great deference and respect, which I afterward learned was because of Lylda herself, and also what she told them about me.

"At several of the intersections of the tunnels there were wide open spaces. One of these we now approached. It was a vast amphitheater, so broad its opposite wall was invisible, and it seemed crowded with people. At the side, on a rocky niche in the wall, a speaker harangued the crowd.

"We skirted the edge of this crowd and plunged into another passageway, sloping downward still more steeply. I was so much interested in the strange scenes opening before me that I remarked little of the distance we traveled. Nor did I question Lylda very often. I was absorbed in the complete similarity between this and my own world in these general characteristics, and yet its complete strangeness in details.

"I felt not the slightest fear. Indeed the sincerity and kindliness of these people seemed absolutely genuine, and the friendly, naïve manner of my little guide put me wholly at my ease. Toward me Lylda's manner was one of childish delight at a new-found possession. Toward those of her own people with whom we talked, I found she preserved a dignity they profoundly respected.

"We had hardly more than entered this last tunnel when I heard the sound of drums and a weird sort of piping music, followed by shouts and cheers. Figures from behind us scurried past, hastening toward the sound. Lylda's clasp on my hand tightened, and she pulled me forward eagerly. As we advanced the crowd became denser, pushing and shoving us about and paying little attention to me.

"In close contact with these people I soon found I was stronger than they, and for a time I had no difficulty in shoving them aside and opening a path for us. They took my rough handling all in good part; in fact, never have I met a more even-tempered, good-natured people than these.

"AFTER a time the crowd became so dense we could advance no more. At this Lylda signed me to bear to the side. As we approached the wall of the cavern she suddenly clasped her hands high over her head and shouted something in a clear, commanding voice. Instantly the crowd fell back, and in a moment I found myself being pulled up a narrow flight of stone steps in the wall and out upon a level space some twenty feet above the heads of the people.

"Several dignitaries occupied this platform. Lylda greeted them quietly, and they made place for us beside the parapet. I could see now that we were at the intersection of a transverse passageway, much broader than the one we had been traversing. And now I received the greatest surprise I had had in this new world, for down this latter tunnel was passing a broad line of men who obviously were soldiers.

"The uniformly straight lines they held; the glint of light on the spears they carried upright before them; the weird, but rhythmic, music that passed at intervals, with which they kept step; and, above all, the cheering enthusiasm of the crowd, all seemed like an echo of my own great world above.

"This martial ardor and what it implied came as a distinct shock. All I had seen before showed the gentle kindliness of a people whose life seemed far removed from the struggle for existence to which our race is subjected. I had come gradually to feel that this new world, at least, had attained the golden age of security, and that fear, hate, and wrong-doing had long since passed away, or had never been born.

"Yet here, before my very eyes, made wholesome by the fires of patriotism, stalked the grim God of War. Knowing nothing yet of the motives that inspired these people, I could feel no enthusiasm, but only disillusionment at this discovery of the omnipotence of strife.

"For some time I must have stood in silence. Lylda, too, seemed to divine my thoughts, for she did not applaud, but pensively watched the cheering throng below. All at once, with an impulsively appealing movement, she pulled me down toward her, and pressed her pretty cheek to mine. It seemed almost as if she was asking me to help.

"The line of marching men seemed now to have passed, and the crowd surged over into the open space and began to disperse. As the men upon the platform

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with us prepared to leave, Lylda led me over to one of them. He was nearly as tall as I, and dressed in the characteristic tunic that seemed universally worn by both sexes. The upper part of his body was hung with beads, and across his chest was a thin, slightly convex stone plate.

"After a few words of explanation from Lylda, he laid his hands on my shoulders near the base of the neck, smiling with his words of greeting. Then he held one hand before me, palm up, as Lylda had done, and I laid mine in it, which seemed the correct thing to do.

"I repeated this performance with two others who joined us, and then Lylda pulled me away. We descended the steps and turned into the broader tunnel, finding near at hand a sort of sleigh, which Lylda signed me to enter. It was constructed evidently of wood, with a pile of leaves, or similar dead vegetation, for cushions. It was balanced upon a single runner of polished stone, about two feet broad, with a narrow, slightly shorter outrider on each side.

"Harnessed to the shaft were two animals, more resembling our reindeers than anything else, except that they were gray in color and had no horns. An attendant greeted Lylda respectfully as we approached, and mounted a seat in front of us when we were comfortably settled.

"We drove in this curious vehicle for over an hour. The floor of the tunnel was quite smooth, and we glided down its incline with little effort and at a good rate. Our driver preserved the balance of the sleigh by shifting his body from side to side so that only at rare intervals did the side-runners touch the ground.

"Finally, we emerged into the open, and I found myself viewing a scene of almost normal, earthly aspect. We were near the shore of a smooth, shining lake. At the side a broad stretch of rolling country, dotted here and there with trees, was visible. Near at hand, on the lake shore, I saw a collection of houses, most of them low and flat, with one much larger on a promontory near the lake.

"Overhead arched a gray-blue, cloudless sky, faintly star-studded, and reflected in the lake before me I saw that familiar, gleaming trail of star-dust, hanging like a huge straightened rainbow overhead, and ending at my feet."

THE CHEMIST paused and relighted his cigar. "Perhaps you have some questions," he suggested.

The Doctor shifted in his chair.

"Did you have any theory at this time"—he wanted to know—"about the physical conformation of this world? What I mean is, when you came out of this tunnel, were you on the inside or the outside of the world?"

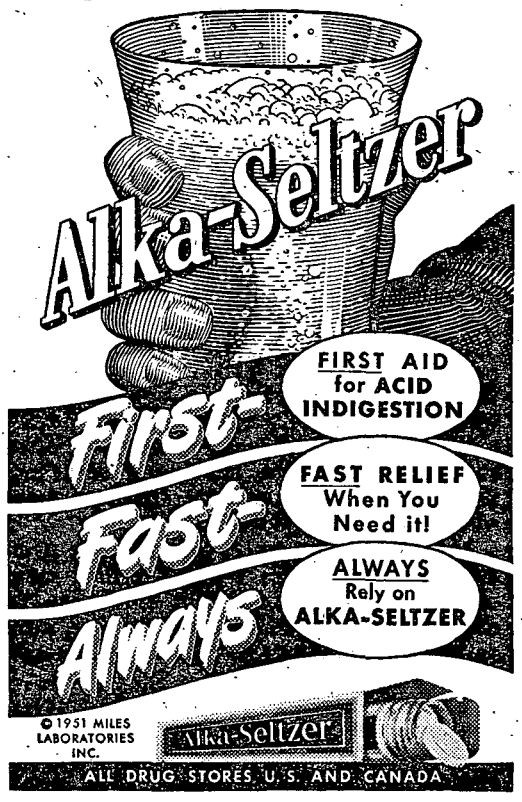
"Was it the same sky you saw overhead when you were in the forest?" asked the Big Business Man.

"No, it was what he saw in the microscope, wasn't it?" said the Very Young Man.

"One at a time, gentlemen." The Chemist laughed. "No, I had no particular theory at this time—I had too many other things to think of. But I do remember noticing one thing which gave me the clue to a fairly complete understanding of this universe. From it I formed a definite explanation, which I found was the belief held by the people themselves."

"What was that?" asked the Very Young Man.

"I noticed, as I stood looking over this broad expanse of country before me, one vital thing that made it different from any similar scene I had ever beheld. If you will stop and think a moment, gentle-



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men, you will realize that in our world here the horizon is caused by a curvature of the earth below the straight line of vision. We are on a convex surface. But as I gazed over this landscape—and even with no appreciable light from the sky, I could see a distance of several miles—I saw at once that quite the reverse was true. I seemed to be standing in the center of a vast shallow bowl. The ground curved upward into the distance. There was no distinct horizon line, only the gradual fading into shadow of the visual landscape. I was standing, obviously, on a concave surface, on the inside, not the outside of the world.

"The situation, as I now understand it, was this: According to the smallest stature I reached, and calling my height at that time roughly six feet, I had descended into the ring at the time I met Lylda several thousand miles, at least. By the way, where is the ring?"

"Here it is," said the Very Young Man, handing it to him. The Chemist replaced it on his finger. "It's pretty important to me now," he said, smiling.

"You bet!" agreed the Very Young Man.

"You can readily understand how I descended such a distance, if you consider the comparative immensity of my stature during the first few hours I was in the ring. It is my understanding that this country through which I passed is a barren waste—merely the atoms of the mineral we call gold.

"Beyond that I entered the hitherto unexplored regions within the atom. The country at that point where I found the forest, I was told later, is habitable for several hundred miles. Around it on all sides lies a desert, across which no one has ever penetrated.

"This surface is the outside of the Oroid world, for so they call their earth. At this point the shell between the outer and inner surface is only a few miles in thickness. The two surfaces do not parallel each other here, so that in descending these tunnels we turned hardly more than an eighth of a complete circle.

"At the city of Arite, where Lylda first took me, and where I had my first view of the inner surface, the curvature is slightly greater than that of our own earth, although, as I have said, in the opposite direction."

"And the space within this curvature—the heavens you have mentioned—how great do you estimate it to be?" asked the Doctor.

"Based on the curvature at Arite it would be about six thousand miles in diameter."

"Has this entire inner surface been explored?" asked the Big Business Man.

"No, only a small portion. The Oroids are not an adventurous people. There are only two nations, less than twelve million people altogether, on a surface nearly as extensive as our own."

"How about those stars?" suggested the Very Young Man.

"I believe they comprise a complete universe similar to our solar system. There is a central sun-star, around which many of the others revolve. You must understand, though, that these other worlds are infinitely tiny compared to the Oroids, and, if inhabited, support beings nearly as much smaller than the Oroids, as they are smaller than you."

"Great Caesar!" ejaculated the Banker. "Don't let's go into that any deeper!"

"Tell us more about Lylda," prompted the Very Young Man.

"You are insatiatable on that point," said the Chemist, laughing. "Well, when we left the sleigh, Lylda took me directly into the city of Arite. I found it an orderly collection of low houses, seemingly built of uniformly cut, highly polished gray blocks. As we passed through the streets, some of which were paved with similar blocks, I was reminded of nothing so much as the old jingles of Spotless Town. Everything was immaculately, inordinately clean. Indeed, the whole city seemed built of some curious form of opaque glass, newly scrubbed and polished.

"Children crowded from the doorways as we advanced, but Lylda dispersed them with a gentle, though firm, command. As we approached the sort of castle I have mentioned, the reason for Lylda's authoritative manner dawned upon me. She was, I soon learned, daughter of one of the most learned men of the nation and was —hand-maiden, do you call it?—to the queen."

"So it was a monarchy?" interrupted the Big Business Man. "I should never have thought that."

"Lylda called their leader a king. In reality he was the president, chosen by the people, for a period of about what we would term twenty years; I learned something about this republic during my stay, but not as much as I would have liked. Politics was not Lylda's strong point, and I had to get it all from her, you know.

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"FOR SEVERAL days I was housed royally in the castle. Food was served me by an attendant who evidently was assigned solely to look after my needs. At first I was terribly confused by the constant, uniform light, but when I found certain hours set aside for sleep, just as we have them, when I began to eat regularly, I soon fell into the routine of this new life.

"The food was not greatly different from our own, although I found not a single article I could identify. It consisted principally of vegetables and fruits, the latter of an apparently inexhaustible variety.

"Lylda visited me at intervals, and I learned I was awaiting an audience with the king. During these days she made rapid progress with my language—so rapid that I shortly gave up the idea of mastering hers.

"And now, with the growing intimacy between us and our ability to communicate more readily, I learned the simple, tragic story of her race—new details, of course, but the old, old tale of might against right, and the tragedy of a trusting, kindly people, blindly thinking others as just as themselves.

"For thousands of years, since the master life-giver had come from one of the stars to populate the world, the Oroid nation had dwelt in peace and security. These people cared nothing for adventure. No restless thirst for knowledge led them to explore deeply the limitless land surrounding them. Even from the earliest times no struggle for existence, no doctrine of the survival of the fittest, hung over them as with us. No wild animals harassed them; no savages menaced them. A fertile boundless land, a perfect climate, nurtured them tenderly.

"Under such conditions they developed only the softer, gentler qualities of nature. Many laws among them were unnecessary, for life was so simple, so pleasant to live, and the attainment of all the commonly accepted standards of wealth so easy, that the incentive to wrongdoing was almost non-existent.

"Strangely enough, and fortunately, too, no individuals rose among them with the desire for power. Those in command were respected and loved as true workers for the people, and they accepted their authority in the same spirit with which it was given. Indolence, in its highest sense the wonderful art of doing nothing gracefully, played the greatest part in their life.

"Then, after centuries of ease and peaceful security, came the awakening. Almost without warning another nation had come out of the unknown to attack them.

"With the hurt feeling that comes to a child unjustly treated, they all but succumbed to this first onslaught. The abduction of numbers of their women, for such seemed the principal purpose of the invaders, aroused them sufficiently to repel this first crude attack. Their manhood challenged, their anger as a nation awakened for the first time, they sprang as one man into the horror we call war.

"With the defeat of the Malites came another period of ease and security. They had learned no lesson, but went their indolent way, playing through life like the kindly children they were. During this last period some intercourse between them and the Malites took place. The latter people, whose origin was probably nearly opposite them on the inner surface, had by degrees pushed their frontiers closer and closer to the Oroids. Trade between the two was carried on to some extent, but the character of the Malites, their instinctive desire for power, for its own sake, their consideration for themselves as superior beings, caused them to be distrusted and feared by their more simple-minded companion nation.

"You can almost guess the rest, gentlemen. Lylda told me little about the Malites, but the loathing disgust of her manner, her hesitancy even to bring herself to mention them, spoke more eloquently than words.

"Four years ago, as they measure time, came the second attack, and now, in a huge arc, only a few hundred miles from Arite, hung the opposing armies."

The Chemist paused. "That's the condition I found, gentlemen," he said. "Not a strikingly original or unfamiliar situation, was it?"

"By Jove!" remarked the Doctor thoughtfully. "What a curious thing that the environment of our earth should so effect that world inside the ring. It does make you stop and think, doesn't it, to realize how those infinitesimal creatures are actuated now by the identical motives that inspire us?"

"Yet it does seem very reasonable, I should say," the Big Business Man put in.

"Let's have another round of drinks," suggested the Banker. "This is dry work!"

"As a scientist you'd make a magnificent plumber, George!" retorted the Big Business Man. "You're about as helpful

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in this little gathering as—as an oyster!"

The Very Young Man rang for a waiter.

"I've been thinking—" began the Banker, and stopped at the smile of his companion. "Shut up!" he finished. "That's cheap wit, you know!"

"Go on, George," encouraged the other, "you've been thinking—"

"I've been tremendously interested in this extraordinary story"—he addressed himself to the Chemist—"but there's one point I don't get at all. How many days were you in that ring do you make out?"

"I believe about seven, all told," returned the Chemist.

"But you were only away from us some forty hours. I ought to know, I've been right here." He looked at his crumpled clothes somewhat ruefully.

"The change of time-progress was one of the surprises of my adventure," said the Chemist. "It is easily explained in a general way, although I cannot even attempt a scientific theory of its cause. But I must confess that before I started, the possibility of such a thing never even occurred to me.

"To get a conception of this change you must analyze definitely what time is. We measure and mark it by years, months, and so forth, down to minutes and seconds, all based upon the movements of our earth around its sun. But that is the measurement of time, not time itself. How would you describe time?"

The Big Business Man smiled. "Time," he said, "is what keeps everything from happening at once."

"Very clever," said the Chemist, laughing.

THE DOCTOR leaned forward earnestly. "I should say," he began, "that time is the rate at which we live—the speed at which we successively pass through our existence from birth to death. It's very hard to put intelligibly, but I think I know what I mean," he finished somewhat lamely.

"Exactly so. Time is a rate of life-progress, different for every individual, and only made standard because we take the time-duration of the earth's revolution around the sun, which is constant, and arbitrarily say: 'That is thirty-one million five hundred and thirty-six thousand seconds.'"

"Is time different for every individual?" asked the Banker argumentatively.

"Think a moment," returned the Chemist. "Suppose your brain were to work twice as fast as mine. Suppose your heart beat twice as fast, and all the functions of your body were accelerated in a like manner. What we call a second would certainly seem to you twice as long. Further than that, it actually would be twice as long, so far as you were concerned. Your digestion, instead of taking perhaps four hours, would take two. You would eat twice as often. The desire for sleep would overtake you every twelve hours instead of twenty-four, and you would be satisfied with four hours of unconsciousness instead of eight. In short, you would soon be living a cycle of two days every twenty-four hours. Time then, as we measure it, for you at least would have doubled—you would be progessing through life at twice the rate that I am through mine."

"That may be theoretically true," the Big Business Man put in. "Practically, though, it has never happened to anyone."

"Of course not, to such a great degree as the instance I put. No one, except in disease, has ever doubled our average rate of life-progress, and lived it out as a balanced, otherwise normal existence. But there is no question that to some much smaller degree we all of us differ one from the other. The difference, however, is so comparatively slight, that we can each one reconcile it to the standard measurement of time. And so, outwardly, time is the same for all of us. But inwardly, why, we none of us conceive a minute or an hour to be the same. How do you know how long a minute is to me? More than that, time is not constant even in the same individual. How many hours are shorter to you than others? How many days have been almost interminable? No, instead of being constant, there is nothing more inconstant than time."

"Haven't you confused two different issues?" suggested the Big Business Man. "Granted what you say about the slightly different rate at which different individuals live, isn't it quite another thing, how long time seems to you? A day when you have nothing to do seems long, or, on the other hand, if you are very busy it seems short. But mind, it only *seems* short or long, according to the preoccupation of your mind. That has nothing to do with the speed of your progress through life."

"Ah, but I think it has!" cried the Chemist. "You forget that we none of us have all of the one thing to the exclusion of the other. Time seems short; it seems

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long, and in the end it all averages up, and makes our rate of progress what it is. Now if any of us were to go through life in a calm, deliberate way, making time seem as long as possible, he would live more years, as we measure them, than if he rushed headlong through the days, accomplishing always as much as possible. I mean in neither case to go to the extremes, but only so far as would be consistent with the maintenance of a normal standard of health. How about it?" He turned to the Doctor. "You ought to have an opinion on that."

"I rather think you are right," said the latter thoughtfully, "although I doubt very much if the man who took it easy would do as much during his longer life as the other with his energy would accomplish in the lesser time that had been allotted to him."

"Probably he wouldn't," said the Chemist; "but that does not alter the point we are discussing."

"How does this apply to the world in the ring?" ventured the Very Young Man, somewhat timidly.

"I believe there is a very close relationship between the dimensions of length, breadth, and thickness, and time. Just what connection with them it has, I have no idea. Yet, when size changes, time-rate changes; you have only to look at our own universe to discover that circumstance."

"How do you mean?" asked the Very Young Man.

"Why, all life on our earth, in a general way, illustrates the fundamental fact that the larger a thing is, the slower its time-progress is. An elephant, for example, lives more years than we humans. Yet a fly is born, matured, and aged in a few months. There are exceptions, of course; but in a majority of cases it is true.

"So fundamental is this fact that the same condition holds with the heavenly bodies. Mercury, smallest of the planets, travels the fastest. Venus, slower, but faster than the earth, and so on throughout the solar system.

"So I believe that as I diminished in stature, my time-progress became faster and faster. I am seven days older than when I left you day before yesterday. I have lived those seven days, gentlemen, there is no way of getting around that fact."

"This is all tremendously interesting," sighed the Big Business Man; "but not very comprehensible."

CHAPTER IV

STRATEGY AND KISSES

"IT WAS the morning of my third day in the castle," began the Chemist again, "that I was taken by Lylda before the king. We found him seated alone in a little anteroom, overlooking a large courtyard, which we could see was crowded with an expectant, waiting throng. I must explain to you now, that I was considered by Lylda somewhat in the light of a Messiah, come to save her nation from the destruction that threatened it.

"She believed me a supernatural being, which, indeed, if you come to think of it, gentlemen, is exactly what I was. I tried to tell her something of myself and the world I had come from, but the difficulties of language and her smiling insistence and faith in her own conception of me, soon caused me to desist. Thereafter I let her have her own way, and did not attempt any explanation again for some time.

"For several weeks before Lylda found me sleeping by the river's edge, she had made almost a daily pilgrimage to that vicinity. A maidenly premonition, a feeling that had first come to her several years before, told her of my coming, and her father's knowledge and scientific beliefs had led her to the outer surface of the world as the direction in which to look. A curious circumstance, gentlemen, lies in the fact that Lylda clearly remembered the occasion when this first premonition came to her. And in the telling, she described graphically the scene in the cave, where I saw her through the microscope." The Chemist paused an instant and then resumed.

"When we entered the presence of the king, he greeted me quietly, and made me sit by his side, while Lylda knelt on the floor at our feet. The king impressed me as a man about fifty years of age. He was smooth-shaven, with black, wavy hair, reaching his shoulders. He was dressed in the usual tunic, the upper part of his body covered by a quite similar garment, ornamented with a variety of metal objects. His feet were protected with a sort of buckskin; at his side hung a crude-looking metal spear.

"The conversation that followed my entrance, lasted perhaps fifteen minutes. Lylda interpreted for us as well as she could, though I must confess we were all

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three at times completely at a loss. But Lylda's bright, intelligent little face, and the resourcefulness of her gestures, always managed somehow to convey her meaning. The charm and grace of her manner, all during the talk, her winsomeness, and the almost spiritual kindness and tenderness that characterized her, made me feel that she embodied all those qualities with which we of this earth idealize our own womanhood.

"I found myself falling steadily under the spell of her beauty, until—well, gentlemen, it's childish for me to enlarge upon this side of my adventure, you know; but—Lylda means everything to me now, and I'm going back for her just as soon as I possibly can."

"Good for you!" cried the Very Young Man. "Why didn't you bring her with you this time?"

"Let him tell it his own way," remonstrated the Doctor. The Very Young Man subsided with a sigh.

"During our talk," resumed the Chemist, "I learned from the king that Lylda had promised him my assistance in overcoming the enemies that threatened his country. He smilingly told me that our charming little interpreter had assured him I would be able to do this. Lylda's blushing face, as she conveyed this meaning to me, was so thoroughly captivating, that before I knew it, and quite without meaning to, I pulled her up toward me and kissed her.

"The king was more surprised by far than Lylda, at this extraordinary behavior. Obviously neither of them had understood what a kiss meant, although Lylda, by her manner, evidently comprehended pretty thoroughly.

"I told them then, as simply as possible to enable Lylda to get my meaning, that I could, and would gladly aid in their war. I explained, then, that I had the power to change my stature, and could make myself grow very large or very small in a short space of time.

"This, as Lylda evidently told it to him, seemed quite beyond the king's understanding. He comprehended finally, or at least he agreed to believe my statement.

"This led to the consideration of practical questions of how I was to proceed in their war. I had not considered any details before, but now they appeared of the utmost simplicity. All I had to do was to make myself a hundred or two hundred feet high, walk out to the battle lines, and scatter the opposing army like toys."

"What a quaint idea!" said the Banker. "A modern *Gulliver*."

The Chemist did not heed this interruption.

"Then like three children we plunged into a discussion of exactly how I was to perform these wonders, the king laughing heartily as we pictured the attack on my tiny enemies.

"He then asked me how I expected to accomplish this change of size, and I very briefly told him of our larger world, and the manner in which I had come from it into his. Then I showed the drugs that I still carried carefully strapped to me. This seemed definitely to convince the king of my sincerity. He rose abruptly to his feet, and strode through a doorway onto a small balcony overlooking the courtyard below.

"As he stepped out into the view of the people, a great cheer arose. He waited quietly for them to stop, and then raised his hand and began speaking. Lylda and I stood hand in hand in the shadow of the doorway, out of sight of the crowd, but with it and the entire courtyard plainly in our view.

"It was a quadrangular enclosure, formed by the four sides of the palace, perhaps three hundred feet across, packed solidly now with people of both sexes, the gleaming whiteness of the upper parts of their bodies, and their upturned faces, making a striking picture.

"For perhaps ten minutes the king spoke steadily, save when he was interrupted by applause. Then he stopped abruptly, and turning, pulled Lylda and me out upon the balcony. The enthusiasm of the crowd doubled at our appearance. I was pushed forward to the balcon rail, where I bowed repeatedly to the cheering throng.

"Just after I left the king's balcony, I met Lylda's father. He was a kindly-faced old gentlemen, and took a great interest in me and my story. He it was who told me about the physical conformation of his world, and he seemed to comprehend my explanation of mine.

"That night it rained—a heavy, torrential downpour, such as we have in the tropics. Lylda and I had been talking for some time, and, I must confess, I had been making love to her ardently. I broached now the principal object of my entrance into her world, and, with an eloquence I did not believe I possessed, I pictured the wonders of our own great earth above, begging her to come back with me and

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live out her life with mine in my world.

"Much of what I said, she probably did not understand, but the main facts were intelligible without question. She listened quietly. When I had finished, and waited for her decision, she reached slowly out and clutched my shoulders, awkwardly making as if to kiss me. In an instant she was in my arms, with a low, happy little cry.

"THE clattering fall of rain brought us to ourselves. Rising to her feet, Lylda pulled me over to the window-opening, and together we stood and looked out into the night. The scene before us was beautiful, with a weirdness almost impossible to describe. It was as bright as I had ever seen this world, for even though very heavy clouds hung overhead, the light from the stars was never more than a negligible quantity.

"We were facing the lake—a shining expanse of silver radiation, its surface shifting and crawling, as though a great undulating blanket of silver mist lay upon it. And coming down to meet it from the sky were innumerable lines of silver—a vast curtain of silver cords that broke apart into great strings of pearls when I followed their downward course.

"And then, as I turned to Lylda, I was struck with the extraordinary weirdness of her beauty as never before. The reflected light from the rain had something the quality of our moonlight. Shining on Lylda's body, it tremendously enhanced the iridescence of her skin. And her face, upturned to mine, bore an expression of radiant happiness and peace such as I had never seen before in a woman's countenance."

The Chemist paused, his voice dying away into silence as he sat lost in thought. Then he pulled himself together with a start. "It was a sight, gentlemen, the memory of which I shall cherish all my life.

"The next day was that set for my entrance into the war. Lylda and I had talked nearly all night, and had decided that she was to return with me to my world. By morning the rain had stopped, and we sat together in the window-opening, silenced with the thrill of the wonderful new joy that had come into our hearts.

"The country before us, under the cloudless, starry sky, stretched gray-blue and beautiful into the quivering obscurity of the distance. At our feet lay the city, just awakening into life. Beyond, over the rolling meadows and fields, wound the road that led out to the battle-front, and coming back over it now, we could see an endless line of vehicles. These, as they passed through the street beneath our window, I found were loaded with soldiers, wounded and dying. I shuddered at the sight of one cart in particular, and Lylda pressed closer to me, pleading with her eyes for my help for her stricken people.

"My exit from the castle was made quite a ceremony. A band of music and a guard of several hundred soldiers ushered me forth, walking beside the king, with Lylda a few paces behind. As we passed through the streets of the city, heading for the open country beyond, we were cheered continually by the people who thronged the streets and crowded upon the housetops to watch us pass.

"Outside Arite I was taken perhaps a mile, where a wide stretch of country gave me the necessary space for my growth. We were standing upon a slight hill, below which, in a vast semicircle, fully a hundred thousand people were watching.

"And now, for the first time, fear overtook me. I realized my situation—saw

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myself in a detached sort of way—a stranger in this extraordinary world, with only the power of my drug to raise me out of it. This drug you must remember, I had not as yet taken. Suppose it were not to act? Or were to act wrongly?

"I glanced around. The king stood before me, quietly waiting my pleasure. Then I turned to Lylda. One glance at her proud, happy little face, and my fear left me as suddenly as it had come. I took her in my arms and kissed her there before that multitude. Then I set her down, and signified to the king I was ready.

"I took a minute quantity of one of the drugs, and as I had done before, sat down with my eyes covered. My sensations were fairly similar to those I have already described. When I looked up after a moment, I found the landscape dwindling to tiny proportions in quite as astonishing a way as it had grown before. The king and Lylda stood now hardly above my ankle.

"A great cry arose from the people—a cry wherein horror, fear, and applause seemed equally mixed. I looked down and saw thousands of them running away in terror.

"Still smaller grew everything within my vision, and then, after a moment, the landscape seemed at rest. I kneeled now upon the ground, carefully, to avoid treading on any of the people around me. I located Lylda and the king after a moment; tiny little creatures less than an inch in height. I was then, I estimated, from their viewpoint, about four hundred feet tall.

"I put my hand flat upon the ground near Lylda, and after a moment she climbed into it, two soldiers lifting her up the side of my thumb as it lay upon the ground. In the hollow of my palm, she lay quite securely, and very carefully I raised her up toward my face. Then, seeing that she was frightened, I set her down again.

"At my feet, hardly more than a few steps away, lay the tiny city of Arite and the lake. I could see all around the latter now, and could make out clearly a line of hills on the other side. Off to the left the road wound up out of sight in the distance. As far as I could see, a line of soldiers was passing out along this road—marching four abreast, with carts at intervals, loaded evidently with supplies; only occasionally, now, vehicles passed in the other direction. Can I make it plain to you, gentlemen, my sensations in changing stature? I felt at first as though I were tremendously high in the air, looking down as from a balloon upon the familiar territory beneath me.

"That feeling passed after a few moments, and I found that my point of view had changed. I no longer felt that I was looking down from a balloon, but felt as a normal person feels. And again I conceived myself but six feet tall, standing above a dainty little toy world. It is all in the viewpoint, of course, and never, during all my changes, was I for more than a moment able to feel of a different stature than I am at this present instant. It was always everything else that changed.

"ACCORDING to the directions I had received from the king, I started now to follow the course of the road. I found it difficult walking, for the country was dotted with houses, trees, and cultivated fields, and each footstep was a separate problem.

"I progressed in this manner perhaps two miles, covering what the day before I would have called about a hundred and thirty or forty miles. The country became wilder as I advanced, and now was in places crowded with separate collections of troops.

"I have not mentioned the commotion I made in this walk over the country. My coming must have been told widely by couriers the night before, to soldiers and peasantry alike, or the sight of me would have caused utter demoralization. As it was, I must have been terrifying to a tremendous degree. I think the careful way in which I picked my course, stepping in the open as much as possible, helped reassure the people. Behind me, whenever I turned, they seemed rather more curious than fearful, and once or twice when I stopped for a few moments they approached my feet closely. One athletic young soldier caught the loose end of the string of one of my buskins, as it hung over my instep close to the ground, and pulled himself up hand over hand, amid the enthusiastic cheers of his admiring comrades.

"I had walked nearly another mile, when almost in front of me, and perhaps a hundred yards away, I saw a remarkable sight that I did not at first understand. The country here was crossed by a winding river running in a general way at right angles to my line of progress. At the right, near at hand, and on the nearer bank of the river, lay a little city, per-

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haps half the size of Arite, with its back up against a hill.

"What first attracted my attention was that, from a dark patch across the river which seemed to be woods, pebbles appeared to pop up at intervals, traversing a little arc perhaps as high as my knees, and falling into the city. I watched for a moment and then I understood. There was a siege in progress, and the catapults of the Malites were bombarding the city with rocks.

"I went up a few steps closer, and the pebbles stopped coming. I stood now beside the city, and as I bent over it, I could see by the battered houses the havoc the bombardment had caused. Inert little figures lay in the streets, and I bent lower and inserted my thumb and forefinger between a row of houses and picked one up. It was the body of a woman, partly mashed. I set it down again hastily.

"Then as I stood up, I felt a sting on my leg. A pebble had hit me on the shin and dropped at my feet. I picked it up. It was the size of a small walnut—a huge boulder six feet or more in diameter it would have been in Lylda's eyes. At the thought of her I was struck with a sudden fit of anger. I flung the pebble violently down into the wooded patch and leaped over the river in one bound, landing squarely on both feet in the woods. It was like jumping into a patch of ferns.

"I stamped about me for a moment until a large part of the woods was crushed down. Then I bent over and poked around with my finger. Underneath the tangled wreckage of tiny tree trunks, lay numbers of the Malites. I must have trodden upon a thousand or more, as one would stamp upon insects.

"The sight sickened me at first, for after all, I could not look upon them as other than men, even though they were only the length of my thumb-nail. I walked a few steps forward, and in all directions I could see swarms of the little creatures running. Then the memory of my coming departure from the world with Lylda, and my promise to the king to rid his land once and for all from these people, made me feel again that they, like vermin, were to be destroyed.

"Without looking directly down, I spent the next two hours stamping over this entire vicinity. Then I ran two or three miles directly toward the country of the Malites, and returning I stamped along the course of the river for a mile or so in both directions. Then I walked back to Arite, again picking my way carefully among crowds of the Oroids, who now feared me so little that I had difficulty in moving around without stepping upon them.

"When I had regained my former size, which needed two successive doses of the drug, I found myself surrounded by a crowd of the Oroids, pushing and shoving each other in an effort to get close to me. The news of my success over their enemy had been divined by them, evidently. Lord knows it must have been obvious enough what I was going to do, when they saw me stride away, a being four hundred feet tall.

"Their enthusiasm and thankfulness now was so mixed with awe and reverent worship of me as a divine being, that when I advanced toward Arite they opened a path immediately. The king, accompanied by Lylda, met me at the edge of the city. The latter threw herself into my arms at once, crying with relief to find me the proper size for her world once more.

"I need not go into details of the ceremonies of rejoicing that took place this afternoon. These people seemed little given to pomp and public demonstration. The king made a speech from his balcony, telling them all I had done, and the city was given over to festivities and preparations to receive suitably the returning soldiers."

The Chemist pushed his chair back from the table, and moistened his dry lips with a swallow of water. "I tell you, gentlemen," he continued, "I felt pretty happy that day. It's a wonderful feeling to find yourself the actual savior of a nation."

At that the Doctor jumped to his feet, overturning his chair, and striking the table a blow with his fist that made the glasses dance.

"By God!" he fairly shouted. "That's just what you can be here to us."

The Banker looked startled, while the Very Young Man pulled the Chemist by the coat in his eagerness to be heard. "A few of those pills," he said in a voice that quivered with excitement, "when you are standing near enemy country, and you can kick the houses apart with the toe of your boot."

"Why not?" said the Big Business Man, and silence fell on the group as they stared at each other, awed by the possibilities that suddenly opened up before them.

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CHAPTER V

"I MUST GO BACK!"

THE TREMENDOUS plan for the salvation of their own suffering world through the Chemist's discovery occupied the five friends for some time. Then laying aside this subject, that now had become of the most vital importance to them all, the Chemist resumed his narrative.

"My last evening in the world of the ring, I spent with Lylda, discussing our future, and making plans for the journey. I must tell you now, gentlemen, that never for a moment during my stay in Arite was I once free from an awful dread of this return trip. I tried to conceive what it would be like, and the more I thought about it, the more hazardous it seemed.

"You must realize, when I was growing smaller, coming in, I was able to climb down, or fall or slide down, into the spaces as they opened up. Going back, I could only imagine the world as closing in upon me, crushing me to death unless I could find a larger space immediately above into which I could climb.

"And as I talked with Lylda about this and tried to make her understand what I hardly understood myself, I gradually was brought to realize the full gravity of the danger confronting us. If only I had made the trip out once before, I could have ventured it with her. But as I looked at her fragile little body, to expose it to the terrible possibilities of such a journey was unthinkable.

"There was another question, too, that troubled me. I had been gone from you nearly a week, and you were only to wait for me two days. I believed firmly that I was living at a faster rate, and that probably my time with you had not expired. But I did not know. And suppose, when I had come out on to the surface of the ring, one of you had had it on his finger walking along the street? No, I did not want Lylda with me in that event.

"And so I told her—made her understand—that she must stay behind, and that I would come back for her. She did not protest. She said nothing—just looked up into my face with wide, staring eyes and a little quiver of her lips. Then she clutched my hand and fell into a low, sobbing cry.

"I held her in my arms for a few moments, so little, so delicate, so human in her sorrow, and yet almost superhuman in her radiant beauty. Soon she stopped crying and smiled up at me bravely.

"Next morning I left. Lylda took me through the tunnels and back into the forest by the river's edge where I had first met her. There we parted. I can see now, her pathetic, drooping little figure as she trudged back to the tunnel.

"When she had disappeared, I sat down to plan out my journey. I resolved now to reverse as nearly as possible the steps I had taken coming in. Acting on this decision, I started back to that portion of the forest where I had trampled it down.

"I found the place without difficulty, stopping once on the way to eat a few berries, and some of the food I carried with me. Then I took a small amount of one of the drugs, and in a few moments the forest-trees had dwindled into tiny twigs beneath my feet.

"I started now to find the huge incline down which I had fallen, and when I reached it, after some hours of wandering, I followed its bottom edge to where a pile of rocks and dirt marked my former landing place. The rocks were much larger than I remembered them, and so I knew I was not so large, now, as when I was here before.

"Remembering the amount of the drug I had taken coming down, I took now twelve of the pills. Then, in a sudden panic, I hastily took two of the others. The result made my head swim most horribly. I sat or lay down, I forget which. When I looked up I saw the hills beyond the river and forest coming toward me, yet dwindling away beneath my feet as they approached. The incline seemed folding up upon itself, like a telescope. As I watched, its upper edge came into view, a curved, luminous line against the blackness above. Every instant it crawled down closer, more sharply curved, and its inclined surface grew steeper.

"All this time, as I stood still, the ground beneath my feet seemed to be moving. It was crawling toward me, and folding up underneath where I was standing. Frequently I had to move to avoid rocks that came at me and passed under my feet into nothingness.

"Then, all at once, I realized that I had been stepping constantly backward, to avoid the incline wall as it shoved itself toward me. I turned to see what was behind, and horror made my flesh creep at what I saw. A black, forbidding wall, much like the incline in front, entirely encircled me. It was hardly more than

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half a mile away, and towered four or five thousand feet overhead.

"And as I stared in terror, I could see it closing in, the line of its upper edge coming steadily closer and lower. I looked wildly around with an overpowering impulse to run. In every direction towered this rocky wall, inexorably swaying in to crush me.

"I think I fainted. When I came to myself the scene had not greatly changed. I was lying at the bottom and against one wall of a circular pit, now about a thousand feet in diameter and nearly twice as deep. The wall all around I could see was almost perpendicular, and it seemed impossible to ascend its smooth, shining sides. The action of the drug had evidently worn off, for everything was quite still.

"My fear had now left me, for I remembered this circular pit quite well. I walked over to its center, and looking around and up to its top, I estimated distance carefully. Then I took two more of the pills.

"Immediately the familiar, sickening, crawling sensation began again. As the walls closed in upon me, I kept carefully in the center of the pit. Steadily they crept in. Now only a few hundred feet away! Now only a few paces—and then I reached out and touched both sides at once with my hands.

"I tell you, gentlemen, it was a terrifying sensation to stand in that well (as it now seemed) and feel its walls closing up with irresistible force. But now the upper edge was within reach of my fingers. I leaped upward and hung for a moment, then pulled myself up and scrambled out, tumbling in a heap on the ground above. As I recovered myself, I looked again at the hole out of which I had escaped; it was hardly big enough to contain my fist.

"I knew, now, I was at the bottom of the scratch. But how different it looked than before. It seemed this time a long, narrow cañon, hardly more than sixty feet across. I glanced up and saw the blue sky overhead that I knew was the space of this room above the ring.

"The problem now was quite a different one than getting out of the pit, for I saw that the scratch was so deep in proportion to its width that if I let myself get too big, I would be crushed by its walls before I could jump out. It would be necessary, therefore, to stay comparatively small and climb up its side.

"I selected what appeared to be an especially rough section, and took a portion of another of the pills. Then I started to climb. After an hour the buskins on my feet were torn to fragments, and I was bruised and battered as you saw me. I see, now, how I could have made both the descent into the ring, and my journey back, with comparatively little effort, but I did the best I knew at the time.

"WHEN THE cañon was about ten feet in width, and I had been climbing arduously for several hours, I

The Slayer of Souls

By Robert W. Chambers

Beauty of perfect innocence, combined with the powers of hell—an unearthly creature was she, the last flaming hope of a civilization battling for its own extinction. So startlingly timely as to be almost a prophecy, yet warmly, unforgettably human, this deathless fantasy is a must on your reading schedule!

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found myself hardly more than fifteen or twenty feet above its bottom. And I was still almost that far from the top. With the stature I had then attained, I could have climbed the remaining distance easily, but for the fact that the wall above had grown too smooth to afford foothold. The effects of the drug had again worn off, and I sat down and prepared to take another dose. I did so—the smallest amount I could—and held ready in my hand a pill of the other kind in case of emergency. Steadily the walls closed in.

"A terrible feeling of dizziness now came over me. I clutched the rock beside which I was sitting, and it seemed to melt like ice beneath my grasp. Then I remembered seeing the edge of the cañon within reach above my head, and with my last remaining strength, I pulled myself up, and fell upon the surface of the ring. You know the rest. I took another dose of the powder, and in a few minutes was back among you."

The Chemist stopped speaking, and looked at his friends. "Well," he said, "you've heard it all. What do you think of it?"

"It is a terrible thing to me," sighed the Very Young Man, "that you did not bring Lylda with you."

"It would have been a terrible thing if I had brought her. But I am going back for her."

"When do you plan to go back?" asked the Doctor after a moment.

"As soon as I can—in a day or two," answered the Chemist.

"Before you do your work here? You must not," remonstrated the Big Business Man. "Our war here needs you, our nation, the whole cause of liberty and freedom needs you. You cannot go."

"Lylda needs me, too," returned the Chemist. "I have an obligation toward her now, you know, quite apart from my own feelings. Understand me, gentlemen," he continued earnestly, "I do not mean to place myself and mine before the great fight for democracy and justice being waged in this world. That would be absurd. But it is not quite that way, actually; I can go back for Lylda and return here in a week. That week will make little difference to the war. On the other hand, if I go to Europe first, it may take me a good many months to complete my task, and during that time Lylda will be using up her life several times faster than I do. No, gentlemen, I am going to her first."

Two days later the company met again in the privacy of the club-room. When they had finished dinner, the Chemist began in his usual quiet way:

"I am going to ask you this time, gentlemen, to give me a full week. There are four of you—six hours a day of watching for each. It need not be too great a hardship. You see," he continued, as they nodded in agreement, "I want to spend a longer period in the ring world this time. I may never go back, and I want to learn, in the interest of science, as much about it as I can. I was there such a short time before, and it was all so strange and remarkable, I confess I learned practically nothing.

"I told you all I could of its history. But of its art, its science, and all its sociological and economic questions, I got hardly more than a glimpse. It is a world and a people far less advanced than ours, yet with something we have not, and probably never will have—the universally distributed milk of human kindness. Yes, gentlemen, it is a world well worth studying."

THE BANKER came out of a brown study. "How about your formulas for these drugs?" he asked abruptly; "where are they?" The Chemist tapped his forehead smilingly. "Well, hadn't you better leave them with us?" the Banker pursued. "The hazards of your trip—you can't tell, you know—"

"Don't misunderstand me, gentlemen," broke in the Chemist. "I wouldn't give you those formulas if my life and even Lylda's depended on it. There again you do not differentiate between the individual and the race. These drugs are the most powerful thing for good in the world to-day. But they are equally as powerful for evil. I would stake my life on what you would do, but I will not stake the life of a nation."

"I know what I'd do if I had the formulas," began the Very Young Man.

"Yes, but I don't know what you'd do," laughed the Chemist. "Don't you see I'm right?"

They admitted they did, though the Banker acquiesced very grudgingly.

"The time of my departure is at hand. Is there anything else, gentlemen, before I leave you?" asked the Chemist, beginning to disrobe.

"Please tell Lylda I want very much to meet her," said the Very Young Man earnestly, and they all laughed.

When the room was cleared, and the

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handkerchief and ring in place once more, the Chemist turned to them again. "Good-by, my friends," he said, holding out his hands. "One week from to-night, at most." Then he took the pills.

No unusual incident marked his departure. The last they saw of him he was sitting on the ring near the scratch.

Then passed the slow days of watching, each taking his turn for the allotted six hours.

By the fifth day, they began hourly to expect the Chemist, but it passed through its weary length, and he did not come. The sixth day dragged by, and then came the last—the day he had promised would end their watching. Still he did not come, and in the evening they gathered, and all four watched together, each unwilling to miss the return of the adventurer and his woman from another world.

But the minutes lengthened into hours, and midnight found the white-faced little group, hopeful yet hopeless, with fear tugging at their hearts. A second week passed, and still they watched, explaining with an optimism they could none of them feel, the non-appearance of their friend. At the end of the second week they met again to talk the situation over, a dull feeling of fear and horror possessing them. The Doctor was the first to voice what now each of them was forced to believe. "I guess it's all useless," he said. "He's not coming back."

"I don't hardly dare give him up," said the Big Business Man.

"Me, too," agreed the Very Young Man sadly.

The Doctor sat for some time in silence, thoughtfully regarding the ring. "My friends," he began finally, "this is too big a thing to deal with in any but the most careful way. I can't imagine what is going on inside that ring, but I do know what is happening in our world, and what our friend's return means to civilization here. Under the circumstances, therefore, I cannot, I will not give him up.

"I am going to put that ring in a museum and pay for having it watched indefinitely. Will you join me?" He turned to the Big Business Man as he spoke.

"Make it a threesome," said the Banker gruffly. "What do you take me for?" and the Very Young Man sighed with the tragedy of youth.

* * *

And so to-day, if you like, you may go and see the ring. It lies in the Museum of the American Society for Biological Research. You will find it near the center of the third gallery, lying on its black silk handkerchief, and covered by a glass bell. The air in the bell is renewed constantly, and near at hand sit two armed guards, watching day and night. And as you stand before it, thinking of the wonderful world within its atoms, you well may shudder at your infinite unimportance as an individual and yet glow with pride at your divine omnipotence as a fragment of human life.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

MAZA OF THE MOON

By Otis Adelbert Kline

To the star-strewn wastes he thundered his challenge—and they answered: "Man must die!"

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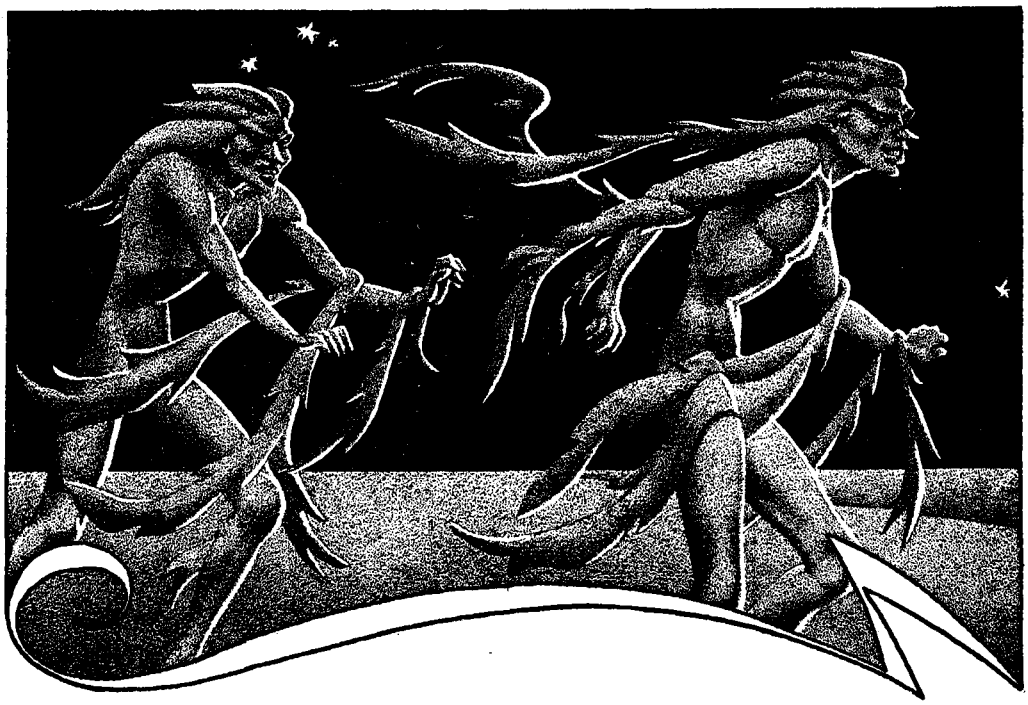

THE WHITE SANDS OF BRIDESRUN BEACH

By M. Ludington Cain

On Bridesrun beach the sands are white,
And here, the shore folk say,
A maid should go in the moon's pale light
On the eve of her wedding day.

She will know that her lover is true, as she
Runs barefoot on the sands,
For three young men will come out of the sea
And run to clasp her hands—

Three young gods with seaweed hair
And shoulders that gleam in the light . . . .
If her lover is true, they will leave her there
And vanish in the night.

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But if unworthy her lover be,
The three will capture her . . . . Then
She will vanish with them out, out in the sea
And never be heard of again!

'Tis an idle thing that the legend tells,
But the shore folk swear 'tis so . . .
(Tomorrow will hear my wedding bells
And my love is true I know) . . . .

The sands of Bridesrun beach are white,
(As white as my bridal veil) . . .
I wish I had courage to go there tonight—
Or never had heard the tale!

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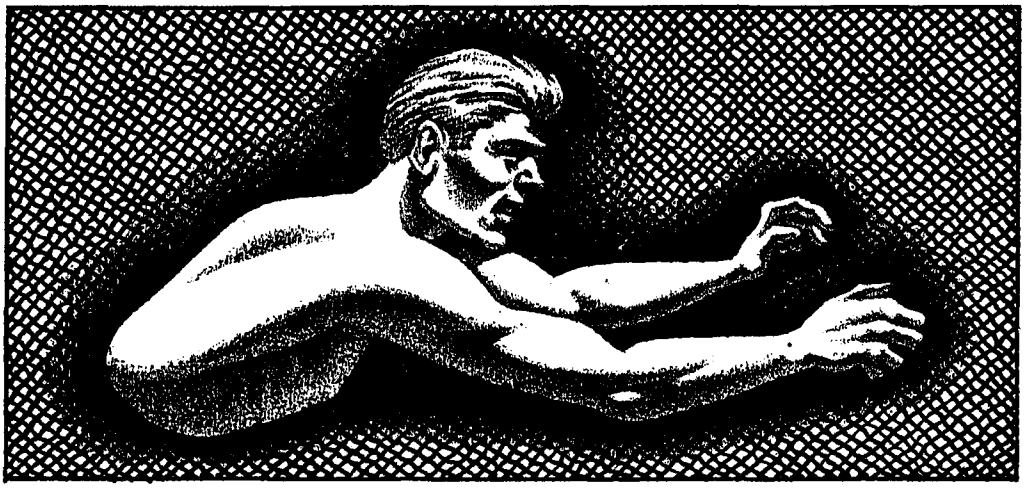

THE SONG OF THE SIRENS

By Edward Lucas White

Woe to the hapless sailor man who stumbles on the 'Sirens' rock. . . . Even such a one as Wilson who looked, but could not hear their luring song of death. . . .

I FIRST caught sight of him as he sat on the wharf. He was seated on a rather large seaman's chest that was painted green and very much battered. He wore gray, his shirt was navy-blue flannel, his necktie a flaring red bandana handkerchief knotted loosely under an ill-fitting lop-sided collar, his hat was soft, gray felt and he held it in his hands on his knees. His hair was fine, straight and lightish, his eyes china-blue, his nose straight, his skin tanned. His features were those of an intelligent face, but there was in it no expression of intelligence, in fact no expression at all. It was this absence of expression that caught my eye. His face was blank, not with the blankness of vacuity, but with the insensibility of abstraction. He sat there amid the voluble loafers, the hurrying stevedores, the shouting wharf-hands, the chattering tackles, the creaking shears and all the hurry and bustle of unloading or loading four vessels, as imperturbable as a bronze statue of Buddha in meditation. His gaze was fixed unvaryingly straight before him and he seemed to notice and observe more distant objects; the larger panorama of moving craft in the harbor, the fussy haste of the scuttling tugboats tugging nothing, the sullen reluctance of the urged scows, the outgoing and incoming pungies and schooners, the interwoven pattern they all formed together, the break in it now and again from the dignified passage of a towed bark or ship or from the stately progress of a big steamer. Of all this he seemed aware, but of what went on about him he seemed not only unaware but unconscious, with an impassivity not as if intentionaly aloof nor absorbingly preoccupied but as if utterly unconscious or totally insensible to it all. During my long, fidgety

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wait that first morning I watched him at intervals a good part of the time. Once a pimply, bloated boarding-master, patrolling the wharf, stopped full in front of him, caught his eye and exchanged a few words with him, otherwise no one seemed to notice him, and he scarcely moved, bare-headed all the while in the June sunlight. When I was at last notified that the *Medorus* would not sail that day, went over her side, and left the pier, I saw him sitting as when I first caught sight of him.

Next morning I found him in almost the same spot, in precisely the same attitude, and with the same demeanor. He might have been there all night.

Soon after I reached the *Medorus* the second morning the bloated boarding-master came on board with that rarity, a native American seaman. I was sitting on the cabin-deck by the saloon-skylight, Griswold on one side of me and Mr. Collins on the other. Captain Benson, puffy, pasty-faced and shifty-eyed, was sitting on the booby-hatch, whistling in an exasperatingly monotonous, tuneless and meaningless fashion. As soon as the Yankee came up the companion-ladder, he halted, turned to the boarding-master, who was following him and blurted out:

"What! Beast Benson! Me ship with Beast Benson!" And back he went down the ladder and off up the pier.

Benson said never a word, but recommenced his whistling. It was part of his undignified shiftlessness that he aired his shame on deck. Almost any captain, fool or knave or both, would have kept his cabin or sat by his saloon table. Benson advertised his helplessness to crew, loafers and passers-by alike.

The boarding-master walked up to Mr. Collins and said:

"You see, sir, I can't do anything. You're lucky enough to be only two hands short for a crew and luckier to have gotten a second mate to sign. Wilson's the best I can do for first mate. He's willing and he's the only man I can get. Not another boarding-master will so much as try for you."

Mr. Collins kept his irritating set smile, his mean little eyes peering out of his narrow face, his stubby scrubbing-brush pepper-and-salt mustache bristling against his nose. He made no reply to the boarding-master but turned to Griswold.

"You're a doctor, aren't you?" he queried.

"Not yet," Griswold replied.

"Well," said Mr. Collins impatiently, "you know pretty much what doctors know?"

"Pretty much, I trust," Griswold answered cheerfully.

"Can you tell whether a man is deaf or not?" Mr. Collins pursued.

"I fancy I could," Griswold declared, gaily.

"Would you mind testing that man over there for me?" Mr. Collins jerked his thumb toward the impassive figure on the seaman's chest.

Griswold stared.

"He looks deaf enough from here," he asserted.

"Try him nearer," Mr. Collins insisted.

GRISWOLD swung off the cabin deck, lounged over to the companion ladder went down it leisurely and sauntered toward the seated mariner. Griswold had a taking way with him, a jaunty manner, an agreeable smile, a charming demeanor and plenty of self-confidence. He usually got on immediately with strangers. So now you could see him win at once the confidence of the man. He looked up at him with a sentient and interested personal glance. They talked some little time and then Griswold sauntered back. He did not speak but seated himself by me as before, lit a fresh cigarette and smoked reflectively.

"Is he deaf?" Mr. Collins inquired.

"Deaf is no word for it," Griswold declared, "an adder is nothing to him. I'll bet he has neither tympanum, malleus, incus nor stapes in either ear, and that both cochleas are totally ossified; that the middle ear is annihilated and the inner ear obliterated on both sides of his head. His hearing is not defective, it is abolished, non-existent. I never saw or heard of a man who impressed me as being so totally deaf."

"What did I tell you?" broke in Captain Benson from the booby-hatch.

"Benson, shut up," said Mr. Collins. Benson took it without any change of expression or attitude.

"You seemed to talk to him," Mr. Collins said to Griswold.

"He can read lips cleverly," Griswold replied. "Only once did I have to repeat anything."

"Did you ask him if he was deaf?" Mr. Collins inquired.

"I did," said Griswold, "and he told the truth instanter."

"Impressed you as truthful, did he?" Mr. Collins queried.

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"Notably," Griswold said. "There is a gentlemanly something about him. He is the kind of man you respect from the first and truthful as possible."

"You hear that, Benson?" Mr. Collins asked.

"What's truthfulness of a pitch-dark night in a gale of wind!" Benson snorted. "The man's stone deaf."

Mr. Collins flared up.

"You may take your choice of three ways," he said. "the *Medorus* tows you out at noon. If you can find a first-mate to suit you by then, or if you take Wilson as first-mate, you take her out. If not, I'll find another master for her and you can find another ship."

Benson lumbered off the booby-hatch and disappeared down the cabin companion-way. The cabin-boy came up whistling, went briskly over the side, and scampered some little distance up the pier to where three boarding-masters stood chatting. One of them came back with him, three or four half sober sailors tagging after him. These he left by the deaf man's sea chest. Its owner came aboard with him and together they went down into the cabin.

"Look here, Mr. Collins," I said, "I've half a mind to back out of this and stay ashore!"

"Why?" he queried, his little gray eyes like slits in his face.

"I heard this captain called Beast Benson, I see he had difficulty in getting a crew and before me you force him to take a deaf mate. An unwilling crew, a defective officer and an unpopular captain seem to me to make a risky combination."

"All combinations are risky at sea, as far as that goes," said Mr. Collins easily. "Most crews are unwilling and few captains popular. Benson is not half a bad captain. He always has bother getting a crew because he is economical of food with them. But you'll find good eating in the cabin. He has never had any trouble with a crew, once at sea. He is cautious, takes better care of his sails, rigging and tackle than any man I know, is a natural genius at seamanship, humoring his ship, coaxing the wind and all that. And he is a precious sharp hand to sell flour and buy coffee, I can tell you. You'll be safe with him. I should feel perfectly safe with him. I'm sorry I can't go, I can tell you."

"But the deaf mate," I persisted.

"He has good discharges," said Mr. Collins, "and is well spoken of. He's all right."

At that moment the boarding-master came out of the cabin and went over the side. Two of the sailors picked up the first-mate's chest and it was soon aboard. The two men went down into the cabin to sign articles. As they went down and as they came up I had a good look at them. One was a Mecklenburger, a lout of a hulking boy, with an ugly face made uglier by loathsome swellings under his chin. The other was a big, stout Irishman, his curly hair tousled, his fat face flushed, his eyes wild and rolling with the after-effects of a shore debauch. His eyes were notable, one bright enamel-blue, the other skinned-over with an opaque, white film. He lurched against the companion-hatch, as he came up, and half-rolled, half-stumbled forward. He was still three-quarters drunk.

The *Medorus* towed us at noon. Mr. Collins and Griswold stayed aboard till the tug cast loose, about dusk. After that he worked down the bay under our own sail. Even in the bay I was seasick and for some days I took little interest in anything. I had made some attempt to eat, but beyond calling the first-mate Mr. Wilson and the second mate Mr. Olsen, my brief stays at the table had profited me little. I had brought a steamer-chair with me and lolled in it most of the daylight; too limp to notice much of anything.

I couldn't help noticing Captain Benson's undignified behavior. A merchant captain, beyond taking the sun each morning and noon and being waked at midnight by the mate just off watch to hear his report, plotting his course on his chart and keeping his log, concerns himself not at all with the management of his ship, except when he takes the wheel at the critical moment of tacking, or of box-hauling, if the wind changes suddenly, or when a dangerous storm makes it incumbent upon him to take charge continually. Otherwise he leaves all routine matters to the mate on watch.

Benson transgressed sea-etiquette continually in this respect. He was forever nosing about and interfering with one or the other mate in respect to matters too small for a self-respecting captain's notice. His mate's contempt for him was plain enough, but was discreetly veiled behind silent lips, expressionless face and far-off eyes. The men were more open and exchanged sneering glances. The captain would sit on the edge of the cabin-deck, his feet dangling over the poop-deck, and continually nag the steersman, keeping it up for hours.

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"Keep her up to the wind," he would say, "keep that royal lifting."

"Aye, aye, sir," would come from the man at the wheel.

Next moment, the captain would shout: "Let her off, you damn fool. You'll have her aback!".

"Let her go off, sir," the victim would reply.

Presently again Benson would snarl:

"Where are you lettin' her go to? Keep her up to the wind."

"Keep her up to wind, sir," would come the reply and so on in maddening reiteration.

A DAY or two after we cleared the capes the big one-eyed Irishman had the wheel. His name, I found afterwards, was Terence Burke and he was from Five Rivers, Canada. He had been a mariner all his life; knew most of the seas and ports of the world. He was especially proud of having been in the United States Navy and of his Civil War record. He had been one of the seamen on the *Congress* or the *Cumberland,* I forget which, and graphic were his descriptions of his sensations while the *Merrimac's* shells were tearing through the helpless ship, the men lying flat in rows on the farther side of the decks and the six-foot live-oak splinters, deadly as the bits of shell themselves, flying murderously about as each shell burst; of how they took to their boats after dark, and reached the shore, expecting to be captured every moment; of how they saw the *Ericsson's* lights (Burke always called the *Monitor* the *Ericsson)* coming in from the sea, and took heart. Burke was justly proud that he had been one of the men detailed, as biggest and strongest, to work the *Ericsson's* guns, and that he had helped fight her big turret guns in her famous first battle.

All this about Burke I did not learn till many days later. But it was plain to be seen, even by a seasick land-lubber, that he was an able seaman, seasoned, competent and self-respecting. All that was manifest all over him as he stood at the wheel. Likewise it was plain that he had brought liquor aboard with him, for he was still half-drunk, and quarrelsome drunk. Even I could see that in his attitude, in his florid face, in his boiled eye. But Captain Benson did not see it when presently he came on deck and seated himself on the edge of the cabin-deck. He cocked his eye up the main-mast and presently growled:

"Let her go off."

Burke shifted the wheel a quarter of a spoke, his jaws clenched, his lips tight shut.

Benson chewed on his quid and kept his eye aloft. Again he growled:

"Keep her up to the wind."

Burke shifted the wheel back a quarter of a spoke, again without any word.

"I'll learn ye sea-manners," Benson snarled, "I'll learn ye to repeat after me what I say. Do ye hear me?"

"Aye, aye, sor," Burke replied, smartly enough.

Shortly Benson came at him again, shouting:

"Let her go off, you damn fool."

"Let her go off, you damn fool, sor," Burke sang out in a rasping Celtic roar which carried to the jibboom.

It was Olsen's watch and the big Norseman was standing by the weather-rigging, his hand on one of the main shrouds. He grinned broadly, full in Captain Benson's face and then looked away to windward. Burke was clutching the spokes as if he were ready to tear them out of the wheel. He looked fighting mad all over. Captain Benson looked aft at him, looked forward, looked aloft, and then rose and went below without a word. Henceforward he worried the steersman no more, unless it were Dutch Charlie, the big loutish boy with the ulcerated chin, or Pomeranian Emil, a timid Baltic waif. Burke and the other full-grown men he let alone.

Next day Burke looked drunker and more belligerent than ever. I noted it, even in my half-daze of flabby nauseated weakness, which subdued me so totally that not even a beautiful and novel spectacle revived me. It was just before noon. The captain and the first-mate had come on deck with their sextants to determine our latitude. The day was fine with a gentle steady breeze, a clear sky and unclouded sunlight, over all the white-capped blue waters. Smoke sighted a little before turned out to be that of a British man-of-war.

Just as the captain told the man at the wheel to make it eight-bells, the man-of-war crossed our bows, all white paint and gilding, her ensign spread, flags everywhere, her band playing and her crew manning the yards. The cabin-boy said it was an English bank-holiday, and that she was bound for Bermuda. I was too flaccid to ask further or to care. I made no attempt to go below for the noon meal. I lay at length in my chair. While the captain

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and mates were at their dinner I could hear loud voices from the forecastle, or perhaps around the galley door.

Presently the first-mate came on deck. He walked to star-board, which was to windward, and stood staring after the far off smoke of the vanished man-of-war. He was a tall, clean-built, square-shouldered man, English in every detail of movement, attitude and demeanor. He interested me, for in spite of his expressionless face he looked far too intelligent for his calling. I was watching him when I was aware of Burke puffing and snorting aft along the main deck. He puffed and snorted up the port companion-ladder to the poop-deck. His face was redder than ever and his eyes redder than his face. He carried a pan of scouse or biscuit-hash or some such mess. He approached the first-mate from behind and hailed him.

"Luke at thot, sor," he said, "Uz thot fit fude fur min?"

The mate, unaware of his presence did not move or speak.

"Luke at thot Oi say," Burke roared. "Uz thot fit to fade min on?"

The mate remained immobile.

Burke gave a sort of snarling howl, hurled at the mate the pannikin, which hit him on the back of the head, its contents going all over his neck and down his collar. As he threw it Burke leaped at the officer. He whirled round before he was seized and met the attack with a short, right-hand jab on Burke's jaw. There was not enough swing in the blow to down the sailor. He clutched both lapels of the mate's open pea jacket and pulled him forward. The force the mate had put into the blow, and the impetus it had imparted to Burke, besides his sideways wrench, took the mate half off his feet. He got in a second jab, this time with his left hand, but again too short to be effective. Both men lurched toward the booby-hatch and the inside breast-pockets of the mate's jolted jacket cascaded a shower of letters upon the deck, which blew hither and thither to port. My chair was out on the cabin-deck just above the port companion-ladder. The booky man's instinct to save written paper shook me out of my lethargy. In an instant I was out of my chair, down the ladder and picking up the scattered envelopes. Not one, I think, went overboard. I saved three by the port rail and a half a dozen more further inboard.

As I scrambled out from one to the other I glanced again and again at the men struggling on the other side of the booby-hatch. The mate had not lost his footing. His short-arm jabs had pushed Burke back till he lost hold of the pea jacket. The Irishman gathered himself for a rush, the mate squared off, in perfect form, met the rush with a left-hand upper cut on the seaman's chin, calculated his swing and planted a terribly accurate right-hand drive full in Burke's face. He went backward over the star-board companion-ladder down into the main deck.

PAYING no more attention to him the mate turned to pick up his letters. He found several on the deck against the booby-hatch, and one by the break of the cabin. Then he looked about for more. I stepped unsteadily toward him and handed him those I had gathered up. In gathering them it had been impossible for me to help noting the address, and the stamps and by the postmarks, which on several were English, on two or three French, on two Italian, on one German, on one Egyptian and on one Australian. The address the same on all, was:

Geoffrey Cecil, Esq.
c/o Alexander Brown & Son,
Baltimore, Maryland
U. S. A.

Instinctively I turned the packet face down as I handed it to him. He took it gracefully and in his totally toneless voice said:

"Thank you very much."

As he said the words Captain Benson appeared in the cabin companion-way, his revolver in his hands. The mate in the act of stowing with his left hand the letters in his inner breast-pocket, pointed his extended index finger at the pistol.

"Put that thing away!" he commanded.

The voice was as toneless as before, but far otherwise than the blurred British evenness of his acknowledgment to me, these words rang hard and sharp. Benson took the rebuke as if he had been the mate and the other his captain, turned and shuffled fumblingly back down the companion-way. As he passed the pantry door the cabin-boy whipped out of it and popped up the companion-way to see, and the big Norse mate emerged deliberately behind him.

By this time the fat steward and most of the crew had come aft and gathered about the prostrate Burke.

The first-mate cleared the scouse from his neck and collar, took some tarred

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marline from an outside pocket of his pea jacket, and in a leisurely way went down into the waist. He had the men turn Burke over and tie his hands behind him and his ankles together. Then he had buckets of sea-water dashed over him. Burke soon regained consciousness.

"Carry him forward and put him in his bunk," the mate commanded. "When he says he will behave cut him loose."

Captain Benson had come on deck and was standing by the booby-hatch.

"That man ought to be put in irons," he said as the mate turned.

The mate's eyes were on his face as he said it.

"He needs no iron," he retorted crisply. "Why make a mountain out of a mole-hill?"

* * *

I had been hoping that I was getting used to the sea, for I was only passively uncomfortable and mildly wretched. But sometime that night it came on to blow fresh and I waked acutely sea-sick and suffering violently from horrible urging qualms in every joint. I clambered out of my bunk, struggled into some clothes and crawled across the cabin and up the after companion-way to the wheel deck. There I collapsed at full length into four inches of warm rain water against the lee-rail.

At first the baffling breeze was comforting after the stuffy cabin, smelling of stale coffee, damp sea-biscuit, prunes, oilskins and what not. But I was soon too cold, for I was vestless and coatless, and before long my teeth were chattering and I had a general chill to add to my misery. It was the first-mate's watch and coming aft on his eternal round he found me there.

He at once went below and brought me not only vest and jacket but my mackintosh also. I was wet to the skin all over, but the mackintosh was gratefully warm. Forgetting that he could not hear I thanked him inarticulately, and relapsed into my shifting pond, where I slipped into oblivion, my head on the outer timber, the tearing dawn-wind across my face.

Sometime before noon I was again in my chair, as on the day before, and it was again the first-mate's watch. Again I saw Burke come aft. He was not puffing and snorting this time but very silent. His florid face was a sort of gray-brown. His head was tied up and the bandage tilted sideways over his bad eye. He came up the port companion ladder half way from the waist of the poop-deck. There he stood holding on to the top of the rail, looking very humble and abashed. It was some time before the first-mate noticed him or deigned to notice him. In that interval Burke said a score of times:

"Mr. Wilson, sor."

Each time he realized he was ignored he waited meekly for a chance to try again. Finally the mate saw him speak and asked:

"What is it, Burke?"

Burke began to pour out a torrent of speech.

"Come here," said the mate.

When Burke was close to him he said: "Speak slow."

"Shure sor," he said, "ye wudn't go fur to call ut mut'ny when a man's droonk an' makes a fule of himsilf?"

"Perhaps not," the mate replied, his steady eyes on Burke's face.

"Ye wudn't, I know," Burke went on confidently. "Ye see, sor, Oi was half droonk when Oi cum aboord. An' Oi had licker tu, more fule Oi. Mr. Olsen, he cum forrard in the dog-watch afther ye'd taat me me place, and he routed ut out an' hove ut overboord. Oi'm sobered now, sor, with the facer ye giv me an' the cowld wather an' the slape. Oi'm sobered, an' Oi'm sobered for the voyage, sor. Ye'll foind me quoite and rispectful, sor. Oi was droonk, sor, an' the scouse misloiked me, an' Oi made a fule ov mesilf. Ye'll foind me quoite and rispectful, sor, indade ye will. Ye wudn't go for to log me for mut'ny for makin' a fule ov mesilf, sor, wud ye now, sor?"

"No, Burke," said the mate. "I shall not log you. Go forward."

Burke went.

SOME days later I was forward on the forecastle deck, ensconced against the big canvas-covered anchor, leaning over the side and watching the foam about the cut-water and the upspurted coveys of sudden flying fish, darting out of the waves, at the edge of the bark's shadows and veering erratically in their unpredictable flights. Burke, barefoot and chewing a large quid, was going about with a tar-bucket, swabbing mats and other such devices. He approached me.

"Mr. Ferris, sor," he said, "ye wudn't have a bit of washin' a man cud du for ye? Ye'll be strange loike aboord ship, an' this yer foorst voyge, an' yer the only passenger, an' this a sailin' ship, tu. Ye'll be

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thinkin' ov a hotel, Mr. Ferris, sor. An' there's no wan to du washin' here for ye, sor. The cuke is no manner ov use tu ye. Ye give me any bits ye want washed an Oi'll wash 'em nate fur ye. A man-o'-war's man knows a dale ov washin' an' ye'll pay me wut ye loike. Thin I'll not be set ashore in Rio wudout a cint, sor."

"You'll have your wages," I hazarded.

"Not with Beast Benson," he replied; "little duh ye know Beast Benson. Oi know um. Wut didn't go into me advances ull go into the schlopchest. Oi may have a millrace or maybe tu at Rio, divil a cint moor."

This was the beginning of many chats with Burke. He told me of Five Rivers, of his life on men-of-war, of his participation in the battle between the *Merrimac* and the *Ericsson*, as he called the *Monitor*, of unholy adventures in a hundred ports, of countless officers he had served under.

"An' niver wan uz foine a gintlemin uz Mr. Willson," he would wind up. "Niver wan ov them all. Shure, he's no Willson. He ships as John Willson, Liverpool. Now all the seas knows John Willson ov Liverpool. There's thousands ov him. He's afloat all over the wurruld. He's always the same, short and curly-headed, black-haired and dark-faced, ivery John Willson is loike ivery other wan. Ivery Liverpool Portugee uz John Willson whin he cooms to soign articles. But Mr. Wilson's no Liverpool man at all.

"He's a gintlemin, British all over, an' a midlander at thot an' no seaman be naature at all. But he's the gintlemin. Not a midshipman or liftenant did iver Oi see a foiner gintlemin than him, and how sinsible he uz. Haff the officers Oi've served under wuz lunies, sinsible on this or thot, but half luny on most things and luny all over on this or thot. But luke at Mr. Willson. Sinsible all over he uz, sinsible all thru. Luke at the discipline he huz. An' no wunder. Luke at huz oi!

"He cudn't du a mane thing av he wanted tu, he cudn't tell a loi av he wanted tu, he cudn't tell a loi av he throid, thrust me, sor, Oi know, the min knows. It's loike byes at skule wid a tacher, or min in the army wid their orficers. You can't fule thim, they knows, an' wull they knows a man whin they say wan. Oi'd thrust Mr. Willson annywhere and annyhow. So wud anny other sailor man or anny man. Deef he us, deef as an anchor fouled on a rock bottom. But he hears wid huz eyes, wid huz fingers, wid the hull skin av him. He's all sinse an' trewth an' koindness."

Not any other of the sailors besides Burke did I find sociable or communicative or capable, apparently, of intelligent intercourse. Of the captain I saw and heard enough, and more than enough, at meal times. He deserved his nickname and I avoided him with detestation.

The second mate, a big Norwegian named Olaf Olsen, was a kindly soul, but dull and uncommunicative. He had a companionable eye, but neither any need of converse nor any prompting toward it. Speech he never volunteered, questions he answered monosyllabically. One Sunday indeed he so far unbent to ask if he might borrow one of my books. I told him, I doubted if any would please him. He looked them over disappointedly.

"Have you any books of Doomuses?" he queried.

"Doomus?" I repeated after him reflectively.

"You're a scholar, aren't you?" he demanded.

"I aim to be," I said.

"How do you pronounce, D-u-m-a-s?" he inquired.

"I am no Frenchman," I told him, "but Dumas is pretty close to it."

"That's what I said," he shouted, "and they all laughed at me and said 'Doomus, ye damn fool.' Have you any of his books?"

"No," I confessed and he ceased to regard me as worth borrowing from.

Not so Mr. Wilson. Before we ran into the doldrums I had found my sea-legs and exhausted the diversion of learning the name of every bit of rope, metal and wood on the bark, and also the amusement of climbing the rigging. I settled down to luxurious days of reading. The first Sunday afterwards Mr. Wilson asked for a book. I took him into my cabin and showed him my stock, one-volume poets mostly, the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Greek Anthology, Dante, Carducci, Goethe, Heine, Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne and Rossetti, and a dozen volumes of Hugo's lyrics. I watched him as he conned them over and thought I saw his eyes light over the Greek volumes, though I saw in them both desire and resignation. He took Milton to begin on and afterward borrowed my English books in series. I believe he read each entire, certainly he read much during his watches below.

At first I felt equal only to the English myself. But after we entered the glorious south-east trades, I read first Faust, then the Divina Commedia, then the Iliad, and,

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as our voyage neared its end gave myself up to the delights of the Odyssey.

Meanwhile I had come to feel very well acquainted with the deaf mate. Generally we had spent part of each fair Sunday in conversation. He read lips so instantly and accurately that if I faced the sun and he was close to me we talked almost as easily as if he had heard perfectly. The conversations were all of his making. He was not a man whom one would question, whereas he questioned me freely after he had made sure, but very delicately managed tentative beginnings, that I did not at all object to being questioned. He was a little stiff at first, half timid, half wary.

After we grew to know each other he would patrol the deck only at intervals, spending most of his watch seated on the cabin-deck at the break, on the rail or on the booby-hatch, according to the position of my chair. He mostly began:

"Have you ever read ——?" Or, "Did you ever read ——?"

Sometimes I had read the book, oftener I had not. In either case I was fascinated by his sane, cool judgment, equally trenchant and subtle, and by the even flow of his well-chosen words.

Our voyage neared its end sooner than I had anticipated. The south-east trades had been almost head winds for us and we had tacked through them close-hauled, a long leg on the port tack and a short leg on the starboard. Then the proximity of the land blurred the unalterable perpetuity of the trade winds and on a Sunday morning the wind came fair. It was my first experience of running before the wind and it intoxicated me with elation. We were out of sight of land, even of its loom, yet no longer in blue water, but over that enormous sixty-fathom shelf which juts out more than a hundred miles into the Atlantic between Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, or to be more precise, between Canavieiras and Itapemirim. The day was bright and the sky sufficiently diversified with clouds to vary pleasingly its insistent blue, the sea a pale, golden green all torn by racing white-caps and dappled with the scurrying shadows of the clouds. The bark leapt joyously, the combers overtaking her charged in smothers of foam past each counter, the delight of merely living in such a glorious day infected even the crew.

I had my chair amidships by the break of the deck, just abaft the booby-hatch. There I was reading the Odyssey. The mate came and sat down by me on the booby-hatch.

"What are you reading?" he asked as usual.

"About the Sirens," I answered.

The strangest alteration came over his expression.

"Did you ever notice," he asked, "how little Homer really tells about them?"

"I was meditating on just that," I replied. "He tells only that there were two of them and that they sang. I was wondering where the popular notions of their appearance came from."

"What is your idea of the popular notions of their appearance?" he demanded.

"I have a very vague idea," I confessed. "They are generally supposed to have had bird's feet. It seems to me I have seen figures of them as so depicted on Greek tombs and coins. And there is Boecklin's picture."

"Boecklin?" he ruminated. "The Munich man? The morbid man?"

"If you choose to call him so," I assented. "I shouldn't call him morbid."

"His ugly idea is a mere personal conception," he said.

"I grant you that," I agreed, "as far as the age and the ugliness go. But the bird's feet of some kind are in the general conception."

"The general conception is wrong," he asserted, with something more like an approach to heat than anything I had seen in him.

"You seem to feel very sure of it," I replied.

"I do not feel," he answered, "I know."

"How do you know?" I inquired.

"I have seen them," he asserted.

"Seen them?" I puzzled.

"Yes, seen them," he asseverated. "Seen the twin Sirens under the golden sun, under the silver moon, under the countless stars; watched them singing as they are singing now!"

"What!" I exclaimed.

My face must have painted my amazement, my tone must have betrayed my startled bewilderment.

His face went scarlet and then pale. He sprang up and strode off to the weather rail. There he stood for a long time. Presently he wheeled, crossed the deck, the booby-hatch between us, and plunged down the cabin companionway without looking at me.

He did not once meet my eye during the remaining days of the voyage, let alone approach me. He was again the impassive,

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inscrutable figure I had first seen him on the wharf at Baltimore.

WE DREW near Rio harbor, late of a perfect tropic September day, just too late to enter before sunset. In the brief tropic dusk we anchored under the black beetling shoulder of Itaipu inside the little islands of Mai and Pai. There we lay wobbling at anchor, there I watched the cloudless sky fill with the infinite multitudes of tropic stars, and gazed at the lights of the city, plainly visible through the harbor mouth between Morro de Sao Joao and the Sugar Loaf, twinkling brighter than the stars, not three miles away.

It must have been somewhere toward midnight when he approached me. My chair was by the rail on which he half sat, leaning down to me. So placed he began such a monologue as I had often heard from him, a monologue I could neither question nor modify, which I must listen to entire or break off completely.

"You were astonished," he said, "when I told you I had seen the Sirens, but I have. It was about six years ago. I was then in New York and I had my usual difficulty getting a ship on account of my deafness. My boarding-master tried a Captain George Andrews of the *Joyous Castle*. Andrews looked me over and said he liked me. Then he talked to me alone.

"'We are bound on an adventure,' he said, 'and I want a man who will obey orders and keep his mouth shut.'

"I told him I was his man for whatever risk. With a light mixed cargo, hardly more than half a cargo, hardly more than ballast, we cleared for Guam and a market. I was second mate. The first mate was a big Swede named Gustave Obrink. The very first meal I ever sat down to with him he made an impression on me as one of the greediest men I had ever seen. He not only ate enormously, but he seemed more than half unsatisfied after he had stuffed himself with an amazing quantity of food. He seemed to possess an unbluntable zest in the act of swallowing, an ever fresh gusto for any and every food flavor.

"I never saw a man relish his food so. He was an equally inordinate drinker, the quantity of coffee he could swill at one meal was amazing. Between meals he was always thirsty and drank incredible quantities of water. He was forever going to the butt by the galley door and drinking from it. And he would smack his lips over it and enjoy it as a connoisseur would a rare wine.

"When we came to choose watches Captain Andrews told us to choose a bo'sun for each watch. Obrink wanted to know why.

"The captain told him it was none of his business to ask questions. The Swede assented and backed down. We chose each an Irishman. Obrink, a tall, loose-jointed man named Pat Ryan and I, a compact stocky fellow named Mike Leary. Next day the captain had the boatswains shift their dunnage and bunk and mess aft. They were nearly as great gluttons as Obrink. They fed like animals and the

"Come and get me!" he thundered into the empty vastnesses of space, this tiny, earthbound creature who dared to challenge the dread, immortal race that had tamed the stars . . . and cowered in fear as the answer echoed back—

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subject of food and drink was the backbone of their conversation.

"The crew were hearty eaters as well and Captain Andrews catered to their likings. The *Joyous Castle* was amazingly well found, the cabin fare very abundant and varied, the forecastle food plenty and good.

"Soon after Captain Andrews was sure that the crew had entirely sobered up from their shore-drinking he called them aft one noon and announced that the steward was to serve grog daily until further notice. Naturally they cheered. After that we had a good, cheap wine daily in the cabin. When Captain Andrews had made up his mind that both mates and both boatswains were sober men he had a bottle of whisky placed on the rack over the table and kept filled. It was a curiosity to watch Obrink, Ryan and Leary patronize that bottle. Not one of the three but was cautious, not one of the three but could have drunk three times as much as he did. But the way they savored every drop they took, the affectionate satisfaction they exhibited over each nip, their eager anticipation of the next made a spectacle.

"Captain Andrews kept good discipline, we crossed the line and rounded the Cape of Good Hope without any event.

"When we were off Madagascar, Obrink, going below to get his sextant, missed it from its place. The ship was searched and Captain Andrews held an inquisition. But the sextant was never found, nor any light thrown on how it had disappeared. After that the captain alone took the observations.

"Then began a series of erratic changes of our course. We kept on dodging about for six weeks, until the crew talked of nothing else and openly said the captain was trying to lose us; certainly not one of us except the captain could have designated our position. We knew we were south of the line, not ten degrees south of it, and between 50 and 110 east longitude, but within those limits we might be almost anywhere.

"We had had nothing that could be called a storm since we left New York. When a storm struck us it was a storm indeed. When it blew over it left us making water fast. After a day and a night at the pumps, we took to our boats. Captain Andrews had the cook and the cabin boy in his boat, gave each boatswain a dory and two men, and directed us to steer north by east. When Obrink and I asked for our latitude and longitude he said that was his business. He had had the boats provisioned while we pumped and they were well supplied. We left the ship under a clear sky, the wind light after the storm, the ground-swell running heavy and slow. We lowered near sunset.

"Next morning the Captain's boat had vanished, and there we were, two whale boats, two dories, twenty men in all and no idea of our position.

"The third day we sighted land. It was a low atoll, not much more than a mile across, nearly circular as far as we could make out, with the usual cocoa palms all along its ring, the surf breaking on interrupted reefs off shore, and, as we drew nearer, a channel into the lagoon facing us. As we threaded it we saw about the center of the lagoon a steep narrow, pinkish crag, maybe fifty feet high, with a bit of flat island showing behind it. Otherwise the lagoon was unbroken.

"We made a landing on the atoll near the channel where we had entered, found good water, cocoanuts in abundance and hogs running wild all about; but no traces of human beings. I shot a hog and the men roasted it at once. As they ate they talked of nothing but the short rations they had had in the boats. They were all docile enough and good natured, but I believe every man of them said a dozen times how much he missed his grog, and Obrink, who had kept himself and his boatload well in hand, said a score of times how much he would like to serve out grog, but must take care of his small supply. They talked a great deal of their hunger in the boats and of their relish of the pork; they ate an astonishing number of cocoanuts. It seemed to me that they were as greedy a set of men as could be met with.

"We cut down five palm-trees, and on supports made of the others set one horizontally as a ridge pole. Over this we stretched the sails of the whale-boats. So we camped on the sandbeach of the lagoon. I slept utterly. But when I waked I understood the men one and all to complain of light and broken sleep, of dreams; of dreaming they heard a queer noise like music, of seeming to continue to hear it after they woke. They breakfasted on another hog and on more cocoanuts.

"Then Obrink told me to take charge of the camp. I agreed. He had everything removed from his whale-boat and into it piled all the men, except a little Frenchman who went by no name save 'Frenchy,' a New Englander named Peddicord, a short

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red-headed Irishman named Mullen, Ryan, my boatswain and myself. Those of my watch who wanted to go I let go. They rowed off, across the lagoon toward the pink crag.

"AFTER Obrink and the men were gone I meant to take stock of our stores. I sent Ryan with Frenchy around the atoll in one direction and Peddicord, who had sense for a foremast hand, with Mullen in the other direction. I then went over the stores. Fairly promising for twenty men they were, even a random boat-voyage in the Indian Ocean. With unlimited cocoanuts and abundant hogs they were a handsome provision, and need only be safeguarded from the omnipresent rats.

"Very shortly my four men returned, the two parties nearly at the same time. It was nearly noon, and no sign of Obrink or the boat. I had followed the whale-boat with my glass till it rounded the pink crag, a short half mile away, and had disappeared. Ryan asked my permission to take one dory and go join the rest on the crag. I readily agreed, for I had not yet cached the spirits. They rowed off as the others had.

"I made use of their welcome absence to conceal the liquor in four different places, carefully writing, in my notebook, the marks by which I was to find the caches again. I did the like with most of the ammunition. I had no idea of trying to get the upper hand of Obrink. I meant to tell him of my proceedings and expected him to approve.

"I expected the men back about two hours before sunset. No sign of them appeared. No sign of them near sunset, nor at sunset. Of course I waited inactive until it was too late for me to venture alone on the unknown lagoon at night, and there would have been no sense in one man going to look for nineteen anyhow. Moreover I must protect our stores from hogs and rats. I turned over in my mind a thousand conjectures and slept little.

"Next morning I slung what I could of our stores from our jury-ridge-pole, out of the reach of hogs and rats, made sure that the remaining whale-boat would not get adrift, prepared the remaining dory with cocoanuts, biscuits, a keg of water, liquor, some miscellaneous stores, medicine, ammunition, repeating rifle, my glass and my compass. I carried two revolvers. I knew by this time something was wrong and I rowed warily across the placid lagoon toward the pink crag.

"As I approached it I could not but remark the peacefulness and beauty of my surroundings. The sky was deep tropic blue, the sun not an hour high, the wind a mild breeze, hardly more than rippling the lagoon, my horizon was all the tops of palms on the atoll except the one glimpse of white surf on the reef beyond the channel where we had entered.

"I rowed slowly, for the dory was heavy, and kept looking over my shoulder.

"The crag rose sheer out of deep water. It might have been granite, but I could not tell what sort of stone it was. It was very pink and nothing grew on it, not anything whatever. It was just sheer naked rock. As I rounded it I could see the flattish island beyond. There was not a tree on it and I could see nothing but the even beach of it rising some six or eight feet above high water mark. Nothing was visible beyond the crest of the beach. I knew our men had meant to land on it and I stopped and considered. Then I rowed around the base of the crag. Facing the flat islet was a sort of a shelf of the pink rock, half submerged, half out of the water, sloping very gently and just the place to make a landing.

"I rowed the dory carefully till its bottom grated on the flat top of this shelf, the bow in say a foot of water, the stern over water maybe sixty fathom deep, for I could see no bottom to its limpid blue. I stepped out and drew the dory well up on the shelf. Then I essayed to climb the crag. I succeeded at once, but it was none too easy and I had no leisure to look behind me till I reached the top. Once on the fairly flat top, which might have been thirty feet across, I turned and looked over the islet.

"Then I sat down heavily and took out my flask. I took a big drink, shut my eyes, said a prayer, I think, and looked again. I saw just what I seen before.

"There was about a ship's-length of water between the crag and the islet, which might have been four ship's-lengths across and was nearly circular. All round it was a white beach of clean coral-sand sloping evenly and rising perhaps ten feet at most above high-water mark. The rest of the island was a meadow, nearly level but cupping ever so little from the crest of the beach. It was covered with short, soft-looking grass, of a bright pale green, a green like that of an English lawn in spring.

"In the center of the island and of the meadow it was an oval slab of pinkish

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stone, the same stone, apparently, as made up the crag on which I sat. On it were two shapes of living creatures, but shapes which I rubbed my eyes to look at. Midway between the slab and the crest of the beach a long windrow heap of something white swept in a circle around the slab, maybe ten fathom from it. I did not surely make out what the windrow was composed of until I took my glasses to it.

"But it needed no glass to see our men, all nineteen of them, all sitting, some just inside the white windrow, some just outside of it, some on it, or in it. Their faces were turned to the slab.

"I took my glass out of my pocket, trembling so I could hardly adjust it. With it I saw clearly the windrow as I had guessed, the shapes on the slab as I had seemed to see them with my unaided eyes.

"The windrow was all of human bones. I could see them clearly through the glass.

"THE TWO creatures on the slab were shaped like full-bodied young women. Except their faces, nothing of their flesh was visible. They were clad in something close-fitting, and pearly gray, which clung to every part of them, and revealed every curve of their forms; as it were a tight-fitting envelopment of fine moleskin or chinchilla. But it shimmered in the sunlight more like eider-down.

"And their hair! I rubbed my eyes. I took out my handkerchief and rubbed the lenses of my glasses. I looked again. I saw as before. Their hair was abundant, and fell in curly waves to their hips. But it seemed a deep dark blue, or a dull intense shot-green or both at once or both together. I could not see it any other way.

"And their faces!

"Their faces were those of European women, of young handsome gentlewomen.

"One of them lay on the slab half on her side, her knees a little drawn up, her head on one bent arm, her face toward me, as if asleep. The other sat, supporting herself by one straight arm. Her mouth was open, her lips moved, her face was the face of a woman singing. I dared not look any more. It was so real and so incredible.

"I scanned our men through my glass. I could see their shoulders heave as they breathed, otherwise not one moved a muscle while I looked at him.

"I shut my glass and put it in my pocket. I shouted. Not a man turned. I fixed my gaze so as to observe the whole group at once. I shouted again. Not a man moved. I took my revolver from its holster and fired in the air. Not a single man turned.

"Then I started to clamber down the crag. I had to turn my back on the islet, regard the far horizon, fix my gaze on the camp, discernible by the white patch, where the white sails were stretched over the palm trunk, and try to realize the reality of things before I could gather myself together to climb down.

"I made it, but I nearly lost my hold a dozen times.

"I pushed off the dory, rowed to the islet, and beached the dory between the other and the whale-boat. Both were half adrift and I hauled them up as well as I could.

"Then I went up the beach. When I came to its crest and saw the backs of our men I shouted again. Not a man turned his head. I approached them; their faces were set immovably towards the rock and the two appearances on it.

"Peddicord was nearest to me, the windrow of bones in front of him was not wide nor high. He stared across it. I caught him by the shoulders and shook him, then he did turn his head and look up at me, just a glance, the glance of a peevish, protesting child disturbed at some absorbing play, an unintelligent vacuous glance, unrecognizing and uncomprehending.

"The glance startled me enough, for Peddicord had been a hard-headed, sensible Yankee. But the change in his face, since yesterday, startled me more. Of a sudden I realized that Peddicord, Ryan, Mullen and Frenchy had been without food or water since I last saw them, that they had been just where I found them since soon after they left me, had been exposed the day before to a tropical sun for some six hours, had sat all night also without moving, or sleeping. At the same instant I realized that the rest had been in the same state for some hours longer, some hours of a burning, morning tropical sun. The realization of it lost my head completely. I ran from man to man; I yelled, I pulled them, I struck them.

"Not one struck back, or answered, or looked at me twice. Each shook me off impatiently and, relapsed into his intent posture, even Obrink.

"Obrink, it is true, partially opened his mouth, as if to speak.

"I saw his tongue!

"I ran to the boat, took a handful of ship biscuit and a pan of water, with these I returned to the men.

"Not one would notice the biscuit, not one showed any interest in the water, not

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one looked at it as if he saw it when I held it before his face, not one tried to drink, not one would drink when I tried to force it on him.

"I emptied my flask into the water; with that I went from man to man. Not even the smell of the whiskey roused them. Each pushed the pan from before his face, each resisted me, each shoved me away.

"I went back to the boat, filled a tin cup with raw whisky and went the round with that. Not one would regard it, much less swallow it.

"Then I myself turned to the slab of stone.

"There sat the sirens. Well I recognized now what they were. Both were awake now and both singing. What I had seen through the glass was visible more clearly, more intelligibly. They were indeed shaped like young, healthy women; like well-matured Caucasian women. They were covered all over with close, soft plumage, like the breast of a dove, colored like the breast of a dove, a pale, delicate, iridescent, pinkish, gray. As a woman's long hair might trail to her hips, there trailed from their heads a mass of long dark strands. Imagine single strands of ostrich feathers, a yard long or more, curling spirally or at random, colored the deep, shot, blue-green of the eye of a peacock feather, or of a gamecock's hackles. That was what grew from their heads, as I seemed to see it.

"I STEPPED over the windrow of bones. Some were mere dust; some bleached gray by sun, wind and rain; some white. Skulls were there, five or six I saw in as many yards of the windrow near me and more beyond. In some places the windrow was ten feet wide and three feet deep in the middle. It was made up of the skeletons of hundreds of thousands of victims.

"I took out my other revolver, spun the cylinder, and strode toward the slab.

"Forty feet from it I stopped. I was determined to abolish the superhuman monsters. I was resolute. I was not afraid. But I stopped. Again and again I strove to go nearer, I braced my resolutions. I tried to go nearer. I could not.

"Then I tried to go sideways. I was able to step. I made the circuit of the slab, some forty feet from it. Nearer I could not go. It was as if a glass wall were between me and the sirens.

"Standing at my distance, once I found I could go no nearer, I essayed to aim my revolver at them. My muscles, my nerves refused to obey me. I tried in various ways. I might have been paralyzed. I tried other movements. I was capable of any other movement. But aim at them I could not.

"I regarded them. Especially their faces, their wonderful faces.

"Their investiture of opalescent plumelets covered their throats. Between it and the deep, dark chevelure above, their faces showed ivory-smooth, delicately tinted. I could see their ears too, shell-like ears, entirely human in form, peeping from under the glossy shade of their miraculous tresses.

"They were as alike as any twin sisters.

"Their faces were oval, their features small, clean-cut, regular and shapely, their foreheads were wide and low, their brows were separate, arched, penciled and definite, not of hair, but of tiny feathers, of gold-shot, black, blue-green, like the color of their ringlets, but far darker. I took out my binoculars and conned their brows. Their eyes were dark blue-gray, bright and young, their noses were small and straight, low between the eyes, neither wide nor narrow, and with molded nostrils, rolled and fine.

"Their upper lips were short, both lips crimson red and curved about their small mouths, their teeth were very white, their chins round and babyish. They were beautiful and the act of singing did not mar their beauty. Their mouths did not strain open, but their lips parted easily into an opening. Their throats seemed to ripple like the throat of a trilling canary-bird. They sang with zest and the zest made them all the more beautiful. But it was not so much their beauty that impressed me, it was the nobility of their faces.

"Some years before I had been an officer on the private steam-yacht of a very wealthy nobleman. He was of a family fanatically devoted to the church of Rome and all its interests. Some Austrian nuns, of an order made up exclusively of noblewomen, were about to go to Rome for an audience with the Pope. My employer placed his yacht at their disposal and we took them on at Trieste. They several times sat on deck during the voyage and the return. I watched them as much as I could, for I never had seen such human faces, and I had seen many sorts. Their faces seemed to tell of a long lineage of men all brave and honorable, women gentle and pure. There was not a trace on their faces of any sort of evil in themselves or in anything that had ever really influenced them. They were really saintly faces, the faces of ideal nuns.

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"Well, the sirens' faces were like that, only more ineffably perfect. There was no guile or cruelty in them, no delight in the exercise of their power, no consciousness of my proximity, or of the spell-bound men, or of the uncountable skeletons of their myriad victims. Their faces expressed but one emotion: utter absorption in the ecstasy of singing, the infinite preoccupation of artists in their art.

"I walked all round them, gazing now with all my eyes, now through my short-focused glass. Their coat of feathers was as if very short and close like seal-skin fur and covered them entirely from the throat down, to the ends of their fingers and the soles of their feet. They did not move except to sit up to sing or lie down to sleep. Sometimes both sang together, sometimes alternately, but if one slept the other sang on and on without ceasing.

"I of course could not hear their music, but the mere sight of them fascinated me so that I forgot my weariness from anxiety and loss of sleep, forgot the vertical sun, forgot food and drink, forgot everything.

"But as I could not hear this state was transitory. I began to look elsewhere than at the sirens. My gaze turned again upon the men. Again I made futile efforts to reach the sirens, to shoot at them, to aim at them. I could not.

"I returned to my dory and drank a great deal of water. I ate a shipbiscuit or two. I then made the round of the men, and tried on each, food, water and spirits. They were oblivious to everything except the longing to listen, to listen, to listen.

"I walked around the windrow of bones. With the skulls and collapsing rib-arches I found leather boots, several leather belts, case-knives, kreeses, guns of various patterns, pistols, watches, gold and jeweled finger rings and coins, many coins, copper, silver and gold. The grass was short, and the earth under it smooth as a rolled lawn.

"The bones were of various ages, but all old, except two skeletons, entire, side by side, just beyond the windrow at the portion opposite where the men sat. There was long fine golden hair on one skull. Women too!

"I went back to the dory, rowed to the camp, shot a hog, roasted it, wrapped the steaming meat in fresh leaves and rowed back to the islet. It was not far from sunset.

"Not a man heeded the savory meat, still warm. They just sat and gazed and listened.

"I was free of the spell. I could do them no good by staying. I rowed back to camp before sunset and slept, yes I slept all night long.

"The sun woke me. I shot and cooked another hog, took every bit of rope or marline I could find and rowed back to the islet.

"YOU are to understand that the men had by then been more than forty hours, all of them, without moving or swallowing anything. If I was to save any it must be done quickly.

"I found them as they had been, but with an appalling change in themselves. The day before they had been uncannily unaware of their sufferings, today they were hideously conscious of them.

"Once I had a pet terrier, a neat, trim, intelligent, little beast. He ran under a moving train and had both his hind legs cut off. He dragged himself to me, and the appealing gaze of his eyes expressed his dumb wonder that I did not help him.

"Well, out of the staring, blood-shot eyes of those bewitched men I saw the same look of helpless wonderment and mute appeal.

"Strange, but I never thought of knocking them senseless. I had an idea of tying them one by one, carrying or dragging them to the dory and ferrying my captives to camp.

"I began on Frenchy, he was the smallest.

"He fought like a demon. After all that sleeplessness and fasting he was stronger than I. Our tussle wore me out, but moved him not at all.

"I tried them with the warm juicy, savory pork. They paid not heed to it and pushed me away. I tried them with biscuit, water and liquor. Not one heeded. I tried Obrink particularly. Again he opened his lips. His tongue was black, hard, and swelled till it filled his mouth.

"Then I lost count of time, of what I did, of what happened. I do not know whether it was on that day or the next that the first man died. He was Jack Register, a New York wharf-rat. The next died a few hours later, a Philadelphia seaman he was, named Tom Smith.

"They putrefied with rapidity surpassing anything I ever saw, even in a horse dropped dead of over-driving.

"The rest sat there by the carrion of their comrades, rocking with weakness, crazed by sleeplessness, racked by tortures inexpressible, the gray of death deepening on their faces, listening, listening, listening.

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"As I said, I had lost consciousness of time. I do not know how many days Obrink lived, and he was the last to die. I do not know how long it was after his death before I came to myself.

"When I was myself I made haste to leave the accursed isle. I made ready the second whaleboat with the best stores she could carry and spare sails. I stepped the mast and steered across the lagoon.

"As I passed the islet, I could see nothing but the white sand beach that ringed it. For all my horror I could not resist landing once more for one last look.

"Under the afternoon sun I saw the green meadow, the white curve of bones, the rotting corpses, the pink slab, the feathered sirens, their sweet serene faces uplifted, singing on in a rapt trance.

"I took but one look. I fled. The whaleboat passed the outlet of the lagoon.

"I had been at sea alone for twenty-one days when I was rescued, not three hundred miles from Ceylon, by a tramp steamer out of Colombo bound for Adelaide."

HERE he broke off, stood up and for the rest of the watch maintained his sentry-go by the break of the poop.

Next day we towed into the harbor of Rio de Janeiro, then still the capital of an empire, and mildly enthusiastic for Dom Pedro. I hastened to go ashore. When my boat was ready the deaf mate was forward, superintending the sealing of the hatches.

After some days of discomfort at the Hotel des Etrangers and of worse at Young's Hotel I found a harborage with five jolly bachelors housekeeping in a delightful villa up on Rua do Jonquillos on Santa Theresa. The *Nipsic* was in the harbor and I thought I knew a lieutenant on her and went off one day to visit her. After my visit my boatman landed me at the Red Steps. As I trod up the steps a man came down. He was English all over, irreproachably shod, trousered, coated, gloved, hatted and monocled. Behind him two porters carried big, new portmanteaux. I recognized the man whom I had known as John Wilson of Liverpool, second mate on the *Medorus,* the man who had seen the sirens.

Not only did I recognize him, but he recognized me.

"I am going home," he said, nodding toward a steamer at anchor. "I am glad we met. I enjoyed our talks. Perhaps, we may meet again."

He shook hands without any more words. I stood at the top of the steps and watched his boat put off, watched it as it receded. As I watched a bit of paper on a lower step caught my eye. I went down and picked it up. It was an empty envelope, with an English stamp and postmark, addressed:

Geoffrey Cecil, Esq.,
c/o Swanwick & Co.
54 Rua de Alfandega
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Naturally I asked every Englishman I ever met if he had ever heard of a deaf man named Geoffrey Cecil. For more than ten years I elicited no response. Then at lunch, in the Hotel Victoria at Interlaken, I happened to be seated opposite a stout, elderly Briton. He perceived that I was an American and became affable and agreeable. I never saw him after that lunch and never learned his name.

At a suitable opportunity I put my usual query.

"Geoffrey Cecil?" he said. "Deaf Geoffrey Cecil? Of course I know of him. Knew him too. He was or is Earl of Aldersmere."

"Was or is?" I queried.

"It was this way," my interlocutor explained. "The ninth Earl of Aldersmere had three sons. All pre-deceased him and each left one son. Geoffrey was the heir. He had wanted to go into the Navy, but his deafness cut him off from that. When he quarreled with his father he naturally ran away to sea. Track of him was lost. He was supposed dead. That was years before his father's death.

"When his father died nothing had been heard of him for ten years. But when his grandfather died and his cousin Roger supposed himself Earl, some firm of solicitors interposed, claiming that Geoffrey was alive.

When Geoffrey turned up in six months Roger was disappointed. Geoffrey paid no attention to anything but buying or chartering a steam-yacht. She sailed as soon as possible, passed the canal, touched at Aden, and has never been heard of since.

"That was nine years ago."

"Is Roger Cecil alive?" I asked.

"Very much alive," affirmed my informant.

"You may tell him from me," I declared, "that he is now the Eleventh Earl of Aldersmere."

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The Shadowy Third

By Ellen Glasgow

Nothing on earth was forgotten when he wove his web of hate around his helpless victim. But what he failed to remember was something of heaven—and hell. . . .

WHEN the call came I remember that I turned from the telephone in a romantic flutter. Though I had spoken only once to the great surgeon, Roland Maradick, I felt on that December afternoon that to speak to him only once—to watch him in the operating-room for a single hour—was an adventure which drained the colour and the excitement from the rest of life. After all these years of work on typhoid and pneumonia cases, I can still feel the delicious tremor of my young pulses; I can still see the winter sunshine slanting through the hospital windows over the white uniforms of the nurses.

"He didn't mention me by name. Can there be a mistake?" I stood, incredulous yet ecstatic, before the superintendent of the hospital.

"No, there isn't a mistake. I was talking to him before you came down." Miss Hemphill's strong face softened while she looked at me. She was a big, resolute woman, a distant Canadian relative of my mother's, and the kind of nurse I had discovered in the month since I had come up from Richmond, that Northern hospital boards, if not Northern patients, appear instinctively to select. From the first, in spite of her hardness, she had taken a liking—I hesitate to use the word "fancy" for a preference so impersonal—to her Virginia cousin. After all, it isn't every Southern nurse, just out of training, who can boast a kinswoman in the superintendent of a New York hospital.

"And he made you understand positively that he meant me?" The thing was so wonderful that I simply couldn't believe it.

"He asked particularly for the nurse who was with Miss Hudson last week when he operated. I think he didn't even remember that you had a name. When I asked if he meant Miss Randolph, he repeated that he wanted the nurse who had been with Miss Hudson. She was small, he said, and cheerful-looking. This, of course, might apply to one or two of the others, but none of these was with Miss Hudson."

"Then I suppose it is really true?" My pulses were tingling. "And I am to be there at six o'clock?"

"Not a minute later. The day nurse goes off duty at that hour, and Mrs. Maradick is never left by herself for an instant."

"It is her mind, isn't it? And that makes it all the stranger that he should select me, for I have had so few mental cases."

"So few cases of any kind." Miss Hemphill was smiling, and when she smiled I wondered if the other nurses would know her. "By the time you have gone through the treadmill in New York, Margaret, you will have lost a good many things besides your inexperience. I wonder how long you will keep your sympathy and your imagination? After all, wouldn't you have made a better novelist than a nurse?"

"I can't help putting myself into my cases. I suppose one ought not to?"

"It isn't a question of what one ought to do, but of what one must. When you are drained of every bit of sympathy and enthusiasm, and have got nothing in return for it, not even thanks, you will understand why I try to keep you from wasting yourself."

"But surely in a case like this—for Doctor Maradick?"

"Oh, well, of course—for Doctor Mara-

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A little girl darted airily, with peculiar lightness and grace, through the doorway. . . .

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dick." She must have seen that I implored her confidence, for, after a minute, she let fall carelessly a gleam of light on the situation: "It is a very sad case when you think what a charming man and a great surgeon Doctor Maradick is."

Above the starched collar of my uniform I felt the blood leap in bounds to my cheeks. "I have spoken to him only once," I murmured, "but he is charming, and so kind and handsome, isn't he?"

"His patients adore him."

"Oh, yes, I've seen that. Everyone hangs on his visits." Like the patients and the other nurses, I also had come by delightful, if imperceptible, degrees to hang on the daily visits of Doctor Maradick. He was, I suppose, born to be a hero to women. From my first day in his hospital, from the moment when I watched, through closed shutters, while he stepped out of his car, I have never doubted that he was assigned to the great part in the play. If I had been ignorant of his spell—of the charm he exercised over his hospital—I should have felt it in the waiting hush, like a drawn breath, which followed his ring at the door and preceded his imperious footstep on the stairs.

My first impression of him, even after the terrible events of the next year, records a memory that is both careless and splendid. At that moment, when, gazing through the chinks in the shutters, I watched him, in his coat of dark fur, cross the pavement over the pale streaks of sunshine, I knew beyond any doubt—I knew with a sort of infallible prescience—that my fate was irretrievably bound up with his in the future. I knew this, I repeat, though Miss Hemphill would still insist that my foreknowledge was merely a sentimental gleaning from indiscriminate novels. But is wasn't only first love, impressionable as my kinswoman believed me to be. It wasn't only the way he looked. Even more than his appearance—more than the shining dark of his eyes, the silvery brown of his hair, the dusky glow in his face—even more than his charm and his magnificence, I think, the beauty and sympathy in his voice won my heart. It was a voice, I heard someone say afterwards, that ought always to speak poetry.

So you will see why—if you do not understand at the beginning, I can never hope to make you believe impossible things!—so you will see why I accepted the call when it came as an imperative summons. I couldn't have stayed away after he sent for me. However much I may have tried not to go, I know that in the end I must have gone. In those days, while I was still hoping to write novels, I used to talk a great deal about "destiny" (I have learned since then how silly all such talk is), and I suppose it was my "destiny" to be caught in the web of Roland Maradick's personality. But I am not the first nurse to grow love-sick about a doctor who never gave her a thought.

"I AM glad you got the call, Margaret. It may mean a great deal to you. Only try not to be too emotional." I remember that Miss Hemphill was holding a bit of rose-geranium in her hand while she spoke—one of the patients had given it to her from a pot she kept in her room, and the scent of the flower is still in my nostrils—or my memory. Since then—oh, long since then—I have wondered if she also had been caught in the web.

"I wish I knew more about the case." I was pressing for light. "Have you ever seen Mrs. Maradick?"

"Oh, dear, yes. They have been married only a little over a year, and in the beginning she used to come sometimes to the hospital and wait outside while the doctor made his visits. She was a very sweet-looking woman then—not exactly pretty, but fair and slight, with the loveliest smile, I think, I have ever seen. In those first months she was so much in love that we used to laugh about it among ourselves. To see her face light up when the doctor came out of the hospital and crossed the pavement to his car, was as good as a play. We never tired of watching her—I wasn't superintendent then, so I had more time to look out of the window while I was on day duty. Once or twice she brought her little girl in to see one of the patients. The child was so much like her that you would have known them anywhere for mother and daughter."

I had heard that Mrs. Maradick was a widow, with one child, when she first met the doctor, and I asked now, still seeking an illumination I had not found, "There was a great deal of money, wasn't there?"

"A great fortune. If she hadn't been so attractive, people would have said, I suppose, that Doctor Maradick married her for her money. Only," she appeared to make an effort of memory, "I believe I've heard somehow that it was all left in trust away from Mrs. Maradick if she married again. I can't, to save my life, remember just how it was; but it was a

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queer will, I know, and Mrs. Maradick wasn't to come into the money unless the child didn't live to grow up. The pity of it—"

A young nurse came into the office to ask for something—the keys, I think, of the operating-room, and Miss Hemphill broke off inconclusively as she hurried out of the door. I was sorry that she left off just when she did. Poor Mrs. Maradick! Perhaps I was too emotional, but even before I saw her I had begun to feel her pathos and her strangeness.

My preparations took only a few minutes. In those days I always kept a suitcase packed and ready for sudden calls; and it was not yet six o'clock when I turned from Tenth Street into Fifth Avenue, and stopped for a minute, before ascending the steps, to look at the house in which Doctor Maradick lived. A fine rain was falling, and I remember thinking, as I turned the corner, how depressing the weather must be for Mrs. Maradick. It was an old house, with damp-looking walls (though that may have been because of the rain) and a spindle-shaped iron railing which ran up the stone steps to the black door, where I noticed a dim flicker through the old-fashioned fanlight.

Afterwards I discovered that Mrs. Maradick had been born in the house—her maiden name was Calloran—and that she had never wanted to live anywhere else. She was a woman—this I found out when I knew her better—of strong attachments to both persons and places; and though Doctor Maradick had tried to persuade her to move uptown after her marriage, she had clung, against his wishes, to the old house in lower Fifth Avenue. I dare say she was obstinate about it in spite of her gentleness and her passion for the doctor. Those sweet, soft women, especially when they have always been rich, are sometimes amazingly obstinate. I have nursed so many of them since—women with strong affections and weak intellects—that I have come to recognize the type as soon as I set eyes upon it.

My ring at the bell was answered after a little delay, and when I entered the house I saw that the hall was quite dark except for the waning glow from an open fire which burned in the library. When I gave my name, and added that I was the night nurse, the servant appeared to think my humble presence unworthy of illumination. He was an old butler, inherited perhaps from Mrs. Maradick's mother, who, I learned afterwards, was from South Carolina; and while he passed me on his way up the staircase, I heard him vaguely muttering that he "wa'nt gwinter tu'n on dem lights twel de chile had done playin'."

To the right of the hall, the soft glow drew me into the library, and crossing the threshold timidly, I stooped to dry my wet coat by the fire. As I bent there, meaning to start up at the first sound of a footstep, I thought how cosy the room was after the damp walls outside to which some bared creepers were clinging; and I was watching the strange shapes and patterns the firelight made on the old Persian rug, when the lamps of a slowly turning motor flashed on me through the white shades at the window.

Still dazzled by the glare, I looked round in the dimness and saw a child's ball of red and blue rubber roll towards me out of the gloom of the adjoining room. A moment later, while I made a vain attempt to capture the toy as it spun past me, a little girl darted-airily, with peculiar lightness and grace, through the doorway, and stopped quickly, as if in surprise at the sight of a stranger. She was a small child—so small and slight that her footsteps made no sound on the polished floor of the threshold; and I remember thinking while I looked at her that she had the gravest and sweetest face I had ever seen. She couldn't—I decided this afterwards—have been more than six or seven years old, yet she stood there with a curious prim dignity, like the dignity of an elderly person, and gazed up at me with enigmatical eyes.

She was dressed in white dimity, with a bit of red ribbon in her hair, which was brushed back from her forehead and hung very straight to her shoulders. Charming as she was, from her uncurled brown hair to the white socks and black slippers on her little feet, I recall most vividly the singular look in her eyes, which appeared in the shifting light to be of an indeterminate colour. For the odd thing about this look was that it was not the look of childhood at all. It was the look of profound experience, of bitter knowledge.

"Have you come for your ball?" I asked; but while the friendly question was still on my lips, I heard the servant returning. In my confusion I made a second ineffectual grasp at the plaything, which had rolled away from me into the dusk of the drawing-room. Then, as I raised my head, I saw that the child also had slipped from the room; and without look-

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ing after her I followed the old man into the pleasant study above, where the great surgeon awaited me.

TEN YEARS ago, before hard nursing had taken so much out of me, I blushed very easily, and I was aware at the moment when I crossed Doctor Maradick's study that my cheeks were the colour of peonies. Of course, I was a fool—no one knows this better than I do—but I had never been alone, even for an instant, with him before, and the man was more than a hero to me, he was—there isn't any reason now why I should blush over the confession—almost a god. At that age I was mad about the wonders of surgery, and Roland Maradick in the operating-room was magician enough to have turned an older and more sensible head than mine. Added to his great reputation and his marvelous skill, he was, I am sure of this, the most splendid-looking man, even at forty-five, that one could imagine.

Had he been ungracious—had he been positively rude to me, I should still have adored him; but when he held out his hand, and greeted me in the charming way he had with women, I felt that I would have died for him. It is no wonder that a saying went about the hospital that every woman he operated on fell in love with him. As for the nurses—well, there wasn't a single one of them who had escaped his spell—not even Miss Hemphill, who could have been scarcely a day under fifty.

"I am glad you could come, Miss Randolph. You were with Miss Hudson last week when I operated?"

I bowed. To save my life I couldn't have spoken without blushing the redder.

"I noticed your bright face at the time. Brightness, I think, is what Mrs. Maradick needs. She finds her day nurse depressing." His eyes rested so kindly upon me that I have suspected since that he was not entirely unaware of my worship. It was a small thing, heaven knows, to flatter his vanity—a nurse just out of a training-school—but to some men no tribute is too insignificant to give pleasure.

"You will do your best, I am sure." He hesitated an instant—just long enough for me to perceive the anxiety beneath the genial smile on his face—and then added gravely, "We wish to avoid, if possible, having to send her away."

I could only murmur in response, and after a few carefully chosen words about his wife's illness, he rang the bell and directed the maid to take me upstairs to my room. Not until I was ascending the stairs to the third storey did it occur to me that he had really told me nothing. I was as perplexed about the nature of Mrs. Maradick's malady as I had been when I entered the house.

I found my room pleasant enough. It had been arranged—at Doctor Maradick's request, I think—that I was to sleep in the house, and after my austere little bed at the hospital, I was agreeably surprised by the cheerful look of the apartment into which the maid led me. The walls were papered in roses, and there were curtains of flowered chintz at the window, which looked down on a small formal garden at the rear of the house. This the maid told me, for it was too dark for me to distinguish more than a marble fountain and a fir-tree, which looked old, though I afterwards learned that it was replanted almost every season.

In ten minutes I had slipped into my uniform and was ready to go to my patient; but for some reason—to this day I have never found out what it was that turned her against me at the start—Mrs. Maradick refused to receive me.

While I stood outside her door I heard the day nurse trying to persuade her to let me come in. It wasn't any use, however, and in the end I was obliged to go back to my room and wait until the poor lady got over her whim and consented to see me. That was long after dinner—it must have been nearer eleven than ten o'clock—and Miss Peterson was quite worn out by the time she came for me.

"I'm afraid you'll have a bad night," she said as we went downstairs together. That was her way, I soon saw, to expect the worst of everything and everybody.

"Does she often keep you up like this?"

"Oh, no, she is usually very considerate. I never knew a sweeter character. But she still has this hallucination—"

Here again, as in the scene with Doctor Maradick, I felt that the explanation had only deepened the mystery. Mrs. Maradick's hallucination, whatever form it assumed, was evidently a subject for evasion and subterfuge in the household. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask, "What is her hallucination?"—but before I could get the words past my lips we had reached Mrs. Maradick's door, and Miss Peterson motioned me to be silent. As the door opened a little way to admit me, I saw that Mrs. Maradick was already in bed,

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and that the lights were out except for a night-lamp burning on a candle-stand beside a book and a carafe of water.

"I won't go in with you," said Miss Peterson in a whisper; and I was on the point of stepping over the threshold when I saw the little girl, in the dress of white dimity, slip by me from the dusk of the room into the electric light of the hall. She held a doll in her arms, and as she went by she dropped a doll's work-basket in the doorway. Miss Peterson must have picked up the toy, for when I turned in a minute to look for it I found that it was gone. I remember thinking that it was late for a child to be up—she looked delicate, too—but, after all, it was no business of mine, and four years in a hospital had taught me never to meddle in things that do not concern me. There is nothing a nurse learns quicker than not to try to put the world to rights in a day.

When I crossed the floor to the chair by Mrs. Maradick's bed, she turned over on her side and looked at me with the sweetest and saddest smile.

"You are the night nurse," she said in a gentle voice; and from the moment she spoke I knew that there was nothing hysterical or violent about her mania—or hallucination, as they called it. "They told me your name, but I have forgotten it."

"Randolph—Margaret Randolph." I liked her from the start, and I think she must have seen it.

"You look very young, Miss Randolph."

"I am twenty-two, but I suppose I don't look quite my age. People usually think I am younger."

For a minute she was silent, and while I settled myself in the chair by the bed, I thought how strikingly she resembled the little girl I had seen first in the afternoon, and then leaving her room a few moments before. They had the same small, heart-shaped faces, coloured ever so faintly; the same straight, soft hair, between brown and flaxen; and the same large, grave eyes, set very far apart under arched eyebrows.

What surprised me most, however, was that they both looked at me with that enigmatical and vaguely wondering expression—only in Mrs. Maradick's face the vagueness seemed to change now and then to a definite fear—a flash, I had almost said, of startled horror.

I SAT quite still in my chair, and until the time came for Mrs. Maradick to take her medicine not a word passed between us. Then, when I bent over her with the glass in my hand, she raised her head from the pillow and said in a whisper of suppressed intensity:

"You look kind. I wonder if you could have seen my little girl?"

As I slipped my arm under the pillow I tried to smile cheerfully down on her. "Yes, I've seen her twice. I'd know her anywhere by her likeness to you."

A glow shone in her eyes, and I thought how pretty she must have been before illness took the life and animation out of her features. "Then I know you're good." Her voice was so strained and low that I could barely hear it. "If you weren't good you couldn't have seen her."

I thought this queer enough, but all I answered was, "She looked delicate to be sitting up so late."

A quiver passed over her thin features, and for a minute I thought she was going to burst into tears. As she had taken the medicine, I put the glass back on the candle-stand, and bending over the bed, smoothed the straight brown hair, which was as fine and soft as spun silk, back from her forehead. There was something about her—I don't know what it was—that made you love her as soon as she looked at you.

"She always had that light and airy way, though she was never sick a day in her life," she answered calmly after a pause. Then, groping for my hand, she whispered passionately, "You must not tell him—you must not tell any one that you have seen her!"

"I must not tell any one?" Again I had the impression that had come to me first in Doctor Maradick's study, and afterwards with Miss Peterson on the staircase, that I was seeking a gleam of light in the midst of obscurity.

"Are you sure there isn't any one listening—that there isn't any one at the door?" she asked.

"Quite, quite sure. They have put out the lights in the hall."

"And you will not tell him? Promise me that you will not tell him." The startled horror flashed from the vague wonder of her expression. "He doesn't like her to come back, because he killed her."

"Because he killed her!" Then it was that light burst on me in a blaze. So this was Mrs. Maradick's hallucination! She believed that her child was dead—the little girl I had seen with my own eyes leaving her room; and she believed that her hus-

(Continued on page 102)

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By Harry Walton

WAR GOD'S GAMBLE

His world would perish if he lost—and the fruits of victory would be taken from him if he won. But Flight Lieutenant Stirn had to take a mad gamble with destiny—at which he could not win honestly, and dared not cheat!

THE door segment slid aside with a brief hiss. One second later it shut soundlessly. In that interval Flight Lieutenant Stirn had entered the tiny cylindrical cell. He stood just where he was, staring with horror-glazed eyes at nothing whatsoever.

At the table Navigation Officer Edmond threw down a card in his endless game of solitaire, observing Stirn keenly in one quick glance. He was deliberate in selecting a slender Martian cigarette from the pack at his elbow. Without a word he extended it to Stirn. Slow alarm crept into his expression as the lieutenant made no move toward it.

Edmond unfolded his lean bulk from the chair and came toward the other, whose eyes still took note of nothing. Abruptly the navigator's hand flicked out. The slap cracked loudly in the tiny cell; it left red welts on Stirn's cheek, but had no other effect.

Like a striking snake Edmond's hand flashed out again. Skilled fingers played an instant at the base of Stirn's neck. Abruptly they took their toll; the lieutenant buckled to the floor like a disjointed doll. Edmond caught him as he fell and dragged him to one of the cots.

It was fifteen minutes before Stirn showed signs of recovering from the nerve paralysis induced by that touch, but when his eyes opened they were normal. He managed a wan smile as his glance locked with Edmond's.

"Hi, fellow!"

"Hi, Jerry. You were souped when you came in. I dished a neuro jolt. Have a tough go?"

A visible shudder shook Stirn's slight figure. "Hell on full jets. If I haven't aged fifty years, I'm good for ten thou. The full routine. That devil Gamirand."

Edmond lit a cigarette for him. "Go on, spill. Does you good."

Stirn paused to take a long drag. "Of course, Gamirand was polite as usual—officers' courtesy and all that. Full of regrets for what would happen if I didn't talk—as if this were the first time! Then he turned me over to the psychos. Those green ladies of hell! I honestly think it wouldn't be so bad if they were men."

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The Martian stood regally at ease, his white and gold uniform admirably suiting his saffron complexion. . . .

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"Their psychos are all women, even the therapists."

"These weren't healers," retorted Stirn. "They gave me a needle and I floated off easy—but awake, you understand, and conscious. I'd have traded my pension for a neuro jolt the next half hour—"

"'Prisoners of war shall not be subjected to physical torture of any kind,'" quoted Edmond bitterly. "We wrote the War Code out of the depths of our ignorance, and the Martians signed with their tongues in their cheeks. And yet we knew of psycho-suggestion, all the way from Mesmer in seventeen seventy-five."

"The harpies of Gamirand's go back ten thousand years before that," said Stirn. "They started easy—branding on the arms with a white-hot iron. Damned realistic too, even before the—I mean the induction furnace, and the warm air it radiated, just like the real thing. Maybe they hurried it a bit at that. I remember the iron was black one moment, white-hot the next. Funny the things you think about even while your hide is frying.

"Gamirand came in to ask whether I could possibly give him a hint as to where our grand fleet might be gathering—said he wouldn't ask more of a brother officer. I invited him to hell. The irons vanished and of course there wasn't a mark on my arms, as he asked me to note. Then he said something about a superior race not resorting to crudities. I wonder what they call their own brand of hellishness?"

"I know. 'Certain nuances of the mind, which we find useful in dealing with the lower orders.' Unquote."

"Thanks. I'll cut the grisly details, except to say that they went on to pulling out fingernails, one at a time, and finished with a case of Martian cancer, all very vivid, you know. By that time I—well, you saw me."

"Damn their guts!" exploded Edmond. "Why don't they dish it evenly at least? Why pick on you only?"

"Gamirand explained that. Your neurograph says you won't fold that way. I may. They don't waste effort."

"The block held? You didn't—"

"Spill? Not yet. But you know our psychos aren't in a class with the Marshies. I can feel the block slipping. You'd think knowing it's only hypersuggestion would help you stand it. By God, it doesn't! You live everything they dish out—everything. What good does it do to wake up afterwards and know it wasn't real?"

Edmond's fingers snapped the prison-issue cigarette in two, his heel ground the fragments viciously into the black plastic floor. "Get some sleep now. I want to think."

STIRN drifted off like a child. Twice Edmond paused in his pacing to look at him. He could kill Stirn now and end his agonies. Perhaps he should. The boyish lieutenant had suffered much and was sure to suffer more. He might break any day, any hour, and shriek out what the Marshies wanted to know—information that might cost Earth the war and her freedom.

But what right had he to decide on Stirn's death?

His pacing footsteps echoed to the high roof of their cylindrical prison, twenty-five feet above. The tiny twelve-foot circle of floor was furnished with two cots, two chairs, a table and sanitary arrangements. Clean, light and well ventilated, it fell just short of comfort. The Martians treated prisoners according to the letter of the Code, if not according to the spirit.

His own pacing around the circular cell began to tell on Edmond's nerves. Deliberately he sat down and lit another cigarette. He could not help noticing that his fingers trembled.

It was always like that after Stirn had been tortured. Two weeks of that, his own inactivity since the blasting of the *Medo* and their capture by a Martian cruiser, had left Edmond's nerves almost as raw as the lieutenant's.

If the neurograph ruled out torture in his case, what were the Martians holding him for? Ordinary prisoners were sent to a camp north of the capital. Yet they kept him here, made him watch Stirn suffer the agonies of the damned. What were they softening him up for?

He whirled at the low hiss that announced the opening of the door, but only in time to see it close behind Gamirand. The soft-footed Martian stood regally at ease, his eight-foot figure faultless in a white-and-gold uniform that admirably became his saffron complexion. He accorded Edmond the courtesy of clicking his heels together and snapping his left forearm smartly across his chest, palm down, in the Martian military salute.

"A few words, if you please, Officer Edmond," said the other, stressing the sibilants in the manner of his kind.

"We have nothing to say to each other," returned Edmond curtly.

Gamirand smiled apologetically, yellow

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teeth gleaming. "You resent the treatment poor Lieutenant Stirn brings upon himself. But of course! I agree. It is deplorable that this accursed war should bring such a necessity upon us. Indeed, it is concerning the lieutenant that I wish to speak with you."

"Then I'll listen, promising nothing."

"Good." Instinctively the Martian had spoken in a low tone, and Edmond also, so as not to disturb the man on the cot. "Surely you know he is slowly breaking. That he resists us so magnificently is merely unfortunate, as much for him as for us. Once we break down the inhibiting block your psychologists have implanted in his subconscious, his mind will fail. It is inevitable—surely you have seen the signs."

"Come to the point!" rasped Edmond.

Gamirand sighed.

"The scouting launch of the *Medo* was not damaged when we took your ship. It lies outside the city, fueled and spaceworthy. It is yours, together with safe-conduct past our defensive fleet, in return for your answer to one question."

"I'll give it to you now," said Edmond. "It's 'no'."

"You decide hastily," Gamirand retorted with a sneer. "Your life is safe, and your sanity. Can you say as much for Stirn's?"

Edmond made no reply.

"All we ask," the Martian continued, seeing that the shot had told, "is the rendezvous of your fleet. Does that insure our victory? Hardly—the battle is still to be fought. For a scrap of information, for a doubtful advantage, we are willing to pay a fair price—the freedom of two gallant enemy officers. But even if it did insure our victory—surely it is to Earth's advantage that the war be shortened, particularly since a Martian victory is inevitable in view of Martian superiority."

"That," retorted Edmond, "is something you'll have to demonstrate before we'll believe it. Granting you had ten thousand years of written history before we learned that caves kept the rain off us, I wonder whether you haven't already started down the other side of the hill we're still climbing. Decadence is the name for it—"

He was pleased to see the quiver of Gamirand's twin goatees at this assault on his racial pride.

"Our superiority," returned the Martian stiffly, "is such as your race may not aspire to in ten times ten thousand years. It is inherent in our physical and mental character. What you call the subconscious mind is in us always under control. No Martian could be tortured subjectively, as you can be. Physically the differences are equally great. I can remain alert fifty hours without sleep or drugs, go ninety days without water, three hundred without food. Our very blood is different—that of my race yellow-green, unlike that of any creatures on Mars—yours, I am told by officers who have seen your wounded, like that of our cattle!"

THERE was a long moment of silence.

"On your honor as an officer," said Edmond at last, "would Stirn recover if he were set free now?"

"Knowing you would ask, I inquired. He would."

Edmond stared doubtfully at his chest. Suddenly resolved he unpinned the beribboned medal that hung there, and offered it to the astounded Martian, who took it gravely.

"Know what that is?" asked Edmond hoarsely.

Gamirand studied it. "The imprint evidently represents the solar system. Never having studied your heraldry, I cannot say what the black-and-white ribbon signifies."

"It's given for outstanding service in navigation—why I got it doesn't matter. No, don't give it back. I'd rather not wear it again. I'm going to make a deal."

Gamirand's features showed no surprise. "Excellent. You will be given safe-conduct as soon as our scouts can verify the information you give us."

"Not so fast. I'm not accepting your offer; I'm going to make one myself."

"On what basis?"

"We play a game familiar to us both. If I lose, Stirn and I are set free in return for the information you want. You can check first, of course. But if I win, we're set free at once and tell you nothing."

Gamirand spread his hands. "I have never played it. Do you know our *Dianard?*"

Edmond shook his head. "The only Martian game I'd dare play is *Chianto.* Maybe you know—but why not *Chianto?*"

"Why not?" smiled Gamirand. "I shall send for tiles."

The cell door opened to his mental command, and he left silently. Edmond gathered up the cards, wiped a few crumbs of tobacco off the table. But in turning away he upset the light chair. The clatter of its fall echoed and re-echoed from the rounded wall.

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"Hello," came from Stirn a moment later. "What's up?"

Edmond whirled on him, frowning. "Spilled the chair. Sorry it woke you."

It was Stirn's turn to frown. "Something's up. Gamirand been here?"

"No. Better get back to sleep."

Stirn hunched about on the cot. Scarcely a minute later the door opened to admit Gamirand and an orderly, who placed a handsome platinum-bound plastoid chest on the table. When the man had left, the door slid soundlessly shut behind him.

Gamirand drew four trays from the chest, displaying as many layers of plastoid tiles, their face markings worked in ivory and black, their jet-black backs intricately carved in a uniform design.

"A traditional set," murmured the Martian. "I give you my word they are unmarked."

"Accepted," said Edmond. "Two games to shake down the play, the third for our stakes, if that's agreeable."

Gamirand nodded courteously and shuffled the tiles, face down. He then arranged the fifty-six in rows of seven and folded his hands to show the game might begin.

Edmond drew a trey in an honor suit; Gamirand calmly drew one in his turn. Each placed his piece on edge before him, its back to his opponent. The second draw gave Edmond a numerical tile, which squared the value of the first. He was not so fortunate in his third, which was of a negative value and would have halved the value of his hand, but he was later able to discard it.

The game went on in silence except for low-voiced announcements of discards and challenges. When the scores were totaled, it was Gamirand who had the higher.

"The fortunes of chance," he smiled. "At least I give you fair warning that I mean to win."

"Better luck next time," responded Edmond. "I'm not going to hand your strategic staff the information it wants without a fight. Loser shuffles, I believe?"

The Martian nodded, then, looking across the cell, half rose from his chair. An instant later a hand grasped Edmond's collar and hauled him roughly to his feet. Stirn faced him with burning eyes.

"What is this? What filthy scheme is this?" he demanded.

"You were asleep," retorted Edmond sullenly. "Why the hell didn't you stay asleep?"

"Because you said Gamirand hadn't been here—but he came back with that." The lieutenant jerked his head toward the *Chianto* chest. "I lay awake, listening. It took me till now to piece together enough of the dirty business. You're not gambling away military secrets, Edmond?"

A dark flush suffused Stirn's honest face. "Unless you stop this now I'm going to forget you're top officer."

"Forget and be damned! I'm going to play—"

Stirn hit him twice, viciously, the impact of fists on flesh surprisingly loud in that confined space. Edmond barely lowered his head quickly enough to escape a knockout blow. He was hit in the face both times. Before he could retaliate, two guards had appeared as if by magic and pounced on Stirn. At a word from Gamirand they hauled him, despite his desperate struggles, from the cell.

"SHALL we continue?" asked Gamirand. "But no—you are injured."

"I can play," said Edmond, staunching the flow of blood from his nose with a handkerchief. "But let's cut it short. Next game for the stakes agreed upon."

Gamirand's goatees twitched with surprise. "The next game, then. May I shuffle for you?"

"I'm not asking favors," snarled Edmond. "I'll shuffle."

Clumsily he did so, turning the tiles face down one at a time with one hand—all had been turned face up for scoring. Gamirand watched with thinly veiled disgust, for Edmond's handkerchief was soon soaked with blood. Not until he had awkwardly shuffled the tiles and laid them out did the bleeding stop.

The play was swifter, more intense, yet Gamirand seemed almost preoccupied at times, as though striving to remember some forgotten fact. Twice Edmond called penalties, and as the Martian could not show superior honor titles, scored on both occasions. But on the last draw Gamirand smiled triumphantly.

"The Tile of Death," he said, flipping over a piece that bore on its face a thin-boned Martian skull. "I challenge your score as void."

"So it is, unless I can counter with the Tile of Oblivion. Right?"

The Martian nodded, his eyes incredulous yet anxious. The Tile of Oblivion was a penalty piece, usually discarded as quickly as possible. Its possession after the last

(Continued on page 100)

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(Continued from page 98)

draw halved the player's score, unless it was used to counter such a challenge as Gamirand had made, in which case it doubled the value of its hand.

Very slowly Edmond turned over a tile. Its face was blank. It was the Tile of Oblivion.

Gamirand bowed curtly in acknowledgement of the parry. All the tiles were turned up for scoring. The Martian nodded.

"But you have won—magnificently."

"Thanks," said Edmond dryly. "And now will you call off your sensitives? I've felt the hot breath of at least three of them on my neck for the last ten minutes."

"Four," Gamirand admitted with a wry smile. "Our best telepaths. Unfortunately your guard was impregnable. They could no more tell me what tiles you held than where your fleet is to meet. But you cannot blame me for trying."

"I don't," said Edmond. "And now, one thing more. Part of our wager was Lieutenant Stirn's freedom. It may be he'll refuse it. Will you see that he comes with me anyway?"

The Martian bowed. "With us a gambling debt is truly a debt of honor. We shall make every effort to persuade the lieutenant to go with you. Should we fail, he will come unknowingly."

* * *

The thunder of the spatial drive was drumming through the little ship when Stirn groaningly lifted himself to face Edmond.

"Don't ask," said the latter at once. "I'll just start answering. One, we're aboard the *Medo's* life lauch, free as air. Two, Gamirand doesn't know where the fleet is. Three, you were souped when they carried you in, thanks to some heroics about not winning your freedom by treason—I'm sorry, there was nothing else to be done. Four, we're headed for Pallas."

"Pallas!" roared Stirn. "Why the hell Pallas, when you know the fleet—"

Edmond clapped a hand over his mouth.

"The reason," said Edmond, "lies forward."

He led the way through the tiny passageways of the ship while Stirn followed on unsteady legs—past the food lockers, the drive cubby, the rear emergency port, until they came to a niche in which was racked a bank of seven oxygen tanks.

Edmond spun the valve of the fifth tank. No hiss of gas ensued.

"This nifty bit of camouflage," he explained, "covers an oscillator. You didn't think that old fox Gamirand would overlook a bet, did you? It took me three hours to find this; when I did, I was glad I'd set course for Pallas to begin with. You can bet your buttons that Martian Strategic has a tracer on us. So to Pallas we will go, and I hope the Martian grand fleet follows. Our boys will mop up."

"Okay," grunted Stirn. "I owe you half an apology, maybe. But it was a moonbrained stunt. What if you'd lost?"

"I had to take a chance, I admit. For a minute I thought you'd gone back to sleep."

"I'd gone *what?*"

"Oh, it worked out fine, although I hate to think what would have happened if you hadn't managed to belt me a couple before Gamirand got the guards in to cop you. Poor Gamirand! He tried so hard to keep the game straight—on my side at least."

"If you don't unscramble," threatened Stirn, "I'm going to belt you again."

"Okay. You gave me the first clue yourself, when you said the iron turned from black to white-hot. The psychos made you see that, of course, by hypnotic suggestion only. Then Gamirand made a crack about our inferior blood, and I remembered something they've never let us check. But I checked, by handing Gamirand my service medal. When it clicked, I offered to gamble with him."

"Keep talking," warned Stirn.

"The psychos didn't show the iron red-hot. Gamirand told me my medal had a black-and-white ribbon. And the blood of Martian cattle is black. Ergo, all Martians are completely color-blind to red. Of course their scientists know it but the average chap, like Gamirand, won't remember it. Out of sight, out of mind. They've never seen red; why should they remember it? Even their egotism helps them forget there's anything they can't see that we can. And remember they learn our language under hypnosis. So their minds simply reject the word 'red' as meaningless, and forget it."

"I hope," said Stirn grimly, "that all this has a point."

"Rather—that's why I had to let you sock me. My nose never was able to take it, and right then I needed gore—which looked plain black to Gamirand, and didn't show against the backs of the tiles. I marked the high ones with blood when I turned them over. There wasn't a chance of my losing. Even if I did win by a nose!"

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(Continued from page 93)

band—the great surgeon we worshipped in the hospital—had murdered her. No wonder they veiled the dreadful obsession in mystery! No, wonder that even Miss Peterson had not dared to drag the horrid thing out into the light! It was the kind of hallucination one simply couldn't stand having to face.

"There is no use telling people things that nobody believes," she resumed slowly, still holding my hand in a grasp that would have hurt me if her fingers had not been so fragile. "Nobody believes that he killed her. Nobody believes that she comes back every day to the house. Nobody believes—and yet you saw her—"

"Yes, I saw her—but only why should your husband have killed her?" I spoke soothingly, as one would speak to a person who was quite mad. Yet she was not mad, I could have sworn this while I looked at her.

For a moment she moaned inarticulately, as if the horror of her thoughts were too great to pass into speech. Then she flung out her thin, bare arm wildly.

"Because he never loved me!" she said. "He never loved me!"

"But he married you," I urged gently while I stroked her hair. "If he hadn't loved you, why should he have married you?"

"He wanted the money—my little girl's money. It all goes to him when I die."

"But he is rich himself. He must make a fortune from his profession."

"It isn't enough. He wanted millions." She had grown stern and tragic. "No, he never loved me. He loved someone else from the beginning—before I knew him."

It was quite useless, I saw, to reason with her. If she wasn't mad, she was in a state of terror and despondency so black that it had almost crossed the border-line into madness. I thought once that I would go upstairs and bring the child down from her nursery; but, after a moment's hesitation, I realized that Miss Peterson and Doctor Maradick must have long ago tried all these measures. Clearly, there was nothing to do except soothe and quiet her as much as I could; and this I did until she dropped into a light sleep which lasted well into the morning.

By seven o'clock I was worn out—not from work but from the strain on my sympathy—and I was glad, indeed, when one of the maids came in to bring me an early cup of coffee. Mrs. Maradick was still sleeping—it was a mixture of bromide and chloral I had given her—and she did not wake until Miss Peterson came on duty an hour or two later. Then, when I went downstairs, I found the dining room deserted except for the old housekeeper, who was looking over the silver. Doctor Maradick, she explained to me presently, had his breakfast served in the morning-room on the other side of the house.

"And the little girl? Does she take her meals in the nursery?"

She threw me a startled glance. Was it, I questioned afterwards, one of distrust or apprehension?

"There isn't any little girl. Haven't you heard?"

"Heard? No. Why, I saw her only yesterday."

The look she gave me—I was sure of it now—was full of alarm.

"The little girl—she was the sweetest child I ever saw—died just two months ago of pneumonia."

"But she couldn't have died." I was a fool to let this out, but the shock had completely unnerved me. "I tell you I saw her yesterday."

The alarm in her face deepened. "That is Mrs. Maradick's trouble. She believes that she still sees her."

"But don't you see her?" I drove the question home bluntly.

"No." She set her lips tightly. "I never see anything."

SO I had been wrong, after all, and the explanation, when it came, only accentuated the terror. The child was dead—she had died of pneumonia two months ago—and yet I had seen her, with my own eyes, playing ball in the library; I had seen her slipping out of her mother's room, with her doll in her arms.

"Is there another child in the house? Could there be a child belonging to one of the servants?" A gleam had shot through the fog in which I was groping.

"No, there isn't any other. The doctors tried bringing one once, but it threw the poor lady into such a state she almost died of it. Besides, there wouldn't be any other child as quiet and sweet-looking as Dorothea. To see her skipping along in her dress of white dimity used to make me think of a fairy, though they say that fairies wear green."

"Has any one else seen her—the child, I mean—any of the servants?"

"Only old Gabriel, the butler, who came with Mrs. Maradick's mother from South Carolina. And Gabriel is so old and doty

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—he does no work except answer the doorbell and clean the silver—that nobody pays much attention to anything he sees—"

"Is the child's nursery kept as it was?"

"Oh, no. The doctor had all the toys sent to the children's hospital. That was a great grief to Mrs. Maradick; but Doctor Brandon thought, and all the nurses agreed with him, that it was best for her not to be allowed to keep the room as it was when Dorothea was living."

"Dorothea? Was that the child's name?"

"Yes, it means the gift of God, doesn't it? She was named after the mother of Mrs. Maradick's first husband, Mr. Ballard. He was the grave, quiet kind—not the least like the doctor."

I wondered if the other dreadful obsession of Mrs. Maradick's had drifted down through the nurses or the servants to the housekeeper; but she said nothing about it, and since she was, I suspected, a garrulous person, I thought it wiser to assume that the gossip had not reached her.

A little later, when breakfast was over and I had not yet gone upstairs to my room, I had my first interview with Doctor Brandon, the famous alienist who was in charge of the case. I had never seen him before, but from the first moment that I looked at him I took his measure almost by intuition. He was, I suppose, honest enough—I have always granted him that, bitterly as I have felt towards him. It wasn't his fault that he lacked red blood in his brain, or that he had formed the habit, from long association with abnormal phenomena, of regarding all life as a disease.

He was the sort of physician—every nurse will understand what I mean—who deals instinctively with groups instead of with individuals. He was long and solemn and very round in the face; and I hadn't talked to him ten minutes before I knew he had been educated in Germany, and that he had learned over there to treat every emotion as a pathological manifestation. I used to wonder what he got out of life—what any one got out of life who had analyzed away everything except the bare structure.

When I reached my room at last, I was so tired that I could barely remember either the questions Doctor Brandon had asked or the directions he had given me. I fell asleep, I know, almost as soon as my head touched the pillow; and the maid

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who came to inquire if I wanted luncheon decided to let me finish my nap. In the afternoon, when she returned with a cup of tea, she found me still heavy and drowsy. Though I was used to night nursing, I felt as if I had danced from sunset to daybreak. It was fortunate, I reflected, while I drank my tea, that every case didn't wear on one's sympathies as acutely as Mrs. Maradick's hallucination had worn on mine.

Through the day I did not see Doctor Maradick; but at seven o'clock when I came up from my early dinner on my way to take the place of Miss Peterson, who had kept on duty an hour later than usual, he met me in the hall and asked me to come into his study. I thought him handsomer than ever in his evening clothes, with a white flower in his buttonhole. He was going to some public dinner, the housekeeper told me, but, then, he was always going somewhere. I believe he didn't dine at home a single evening that winter.

"Did Mrs. Maradick have a good night?" He had closed the door after us, and turning now with the question, he smiled kindly, as if he wished to put me at ease in the beginning.

"She slept very well after she took the medicine. I gave her that at eleven o'clock."

For a minute he regarded me silently, and I was aware that his personality—his charm—was focussed upon me. It was almost as if I stood in the centre of converging rays of light, so vivid was my impression of him.

"Did she allude in any way to her—to her hallucination?" he asked.

How the warning reached me—what invisible waves of sense-perception transmitted the message—I have never known; but while I stood there, facing the splendour of the doctor's presence, every intuition cautioned me that the time had come when I must take sides in the household. While I stayed there I must stand either with Mrs. Maradick or against her.

"She talked quite rationally," I replied.

"What did she say?"

"She told me how she was feeling, that she missed her child."

His face changed—how I could not at first determine.

"Have you seen Doctor Brandon?"

"He came this morning to give me his directions."

"He thought her less well to-day. He has

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advised me to send her to Rosedale."

I have never, even in secret, tried to account for Doctor Maradick. He may have been sincere. I tell only what I know—not what I believe or imagine—and the human is sometimes as inscrutable, as inexplicable, as the supernatural.

WHILE he watched me I was conscious of an inner struggle, as if opposing angels warred somewhere in the depths of my being. When at last I made my decision, I was acting less from reason, I knew, than in obedience to the pressure of some secret current of thought. Heaven knows, even then, the man held me captive while I defied him.

"Doctor Maradick," I lifted my eyes for the first time frankly to his, "I believe that your wife is as sane as I am."

He started. "Then she did not talk freely to you?"

"She may be mistaken, unstrung, piteously distressed in mind"—I brought this out with emphasis—"but she is not—I am willing to stake my future on it—a fit subject for an asylum. It would be foolish—it would be cruel to send her to Rosedale."

"Cruel, you say?" A troubled look crossed his face, and his voice grew very gentle. "You do not imagine that I could be cruel to her?"

"No, I do not think that," I said.

"We will let things go on as they are. Perhaps Doctor Brandon may have some other suggestion to make." He drew out his watch and compared it with the clock—nervously, I observed, as if his action were a screen for his discomfiture or perplexity. "I must be going now. We will speak of this again in the morning."

But in the morning we did not speak of it, and during the month that I nursed Mrs. Maradick I was not called again into her husband's study. When I met him in the hall or on the staircase, which was seldom, he was as charming as ever: yet, in spite of his courtesy, I had a persistent feeling that he had taken my measure on that evening, and that he had no further use for me.

As the days went by Mrs. Maradick seemed to grow stronger. Never, after our first night together, had she mentioned the child to me; never had she alluded by so much as a word to her dreadful charge against her husband. She was like any woman recovering from a great sor-

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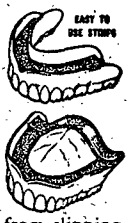

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row, except that she was sweeter and gentler. It is no wonder that everyone who came near her loved her; for there was a mysterious loveliness about her like the mystery of light, not of darkness. She was, I have always thought, as much of an angel as it is possible for a woman to be on this earth. And yet, angelic as she was, there were times when it seemed to me that she both hated and feared her husband. Though he never entered her room while I was there, and I never heard his name on her lips until an hour before the end, still I could tell by the look of terror in her face whenever his step passed down the hall that her very soul shivered at his approach.

During the whole month I did not see the child again, though one night, when I came suddenly into Mrs. Maradick's room, I found a little garden, such as children make out of pebbles and bits of box, on the window-sill. I did not mention it to Mrs. Maradick, and a little later, as the maid lowered the shades, I noticed that the garden had vanished. Since then I have often wondered if the child were invisible only to the rest of us, and if her mother still saw her. But there was no way of finding out except by questioning, and Mrs. Maradick was so well and patient that I hadn't the heart to question. Things couldn't have been better with her than they were, and I was beginning to tell myself that she might soon go out for an airing, when the end came so suddenly.

It was a mild January day—the kind of day that brings the foretaste of spring in the middle of winter, and when I came downstairs in the afternoon, I stopped a minute by the window at the end of the hall to look down on the box maze in the garden. There was an old fountain, bearing two laughing boys in marble, in the centre of the gravelled walk, and the water, which had been turned on that morning for Mrs. Maradick's pleasure, sparkled now like silver as the sunlight splashed over it. I had never before felt the air quite so soft and springlike in January; and I thought, as I gazed down on the garden, that it would be a good idea for Mrs. Maradick to go out and bask for an hour or so in the sunshine. It seemed strange to me that she never went out.

When I went into her room, however, I found that she had no wish to go out. She was sitting, wrapped in shawls, by the open window, which looked down on the fountain; and as I entered she glanced up

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from a little book she was reading. A pot of daffodils stood on the window-sill—she was very fond of flowers and we tried always to keep some growing in her room.

"Do you know what I am reading, Miss Randolph?" she asked in her soft voice; and she read aloud a verse while I went over to the candlestand to measure out a dose of medicine.

"'If thou hast two loaves of bread, sell one and buy daffodils, for bread nourisheth the body, but daffodils delight the soul.' That is very beautiful, don't you think so?"

I said "Yes," that it was beautiful; and then I asked her if she wouldn't go downstairs and walk about in the garden.

"He wouldn't like it," she answered; and it was the first time she had mentioned her husband to me since the night I came to her. "He doesn't want me to go out."

I tried to laugh her out of the idea; but it was no use, and after a few minutes I gave up and began talking of other things. Even then it did not occur to me that her fear of Dr. Maradick was anything but a fancy. I could see, of course, that she wasn't out of her head; but sane persons, I knew, sometimes have unaccountable prejudices, and I accepted her dislike as a mere whim or aversion. I did not understand then and—I may as well confess this before the end comes—I do not understand any better today. I am writing down the things I actually saw, and I repeat that I have never had the slightest twist in the direction of the miraculous.

THE afternoon slipped away while we talked—she talked brightly when any subject came up that interested her—and it was the last hour of day—that grave, still hour when the movement of life seems to droop and falter for a few precious minutes—that brought us the thing I had dreaded silently since my first night in the house. I remember that I had risen to close the window, and was leaning out for a breath of the mild air, when there was the sound of steps, consciously softened, in the hall outside, and Doctor Brandon's usual knock fell on my ears. Then, before I could cross the room, the door opened, and the doctor entered with Miss Peterson. The day nurse, I knew, was a stupid woman; but she had never appeared to me so stupid, so encased in her professional manner.

"I am glad to see that you are taking the air." As Doctor Brandon came over to the window, I wondered maliciously

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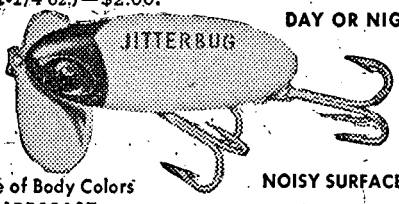

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what devil of contradictions had made him a distinguished specialist in nervous diseases.

"Who was the other doctor you brought this morning?" asked Mrs. Maradick gravely; and that was all I ever heard about the visit of the second alienist.

"Someone who is anxious to cure you." He dropped into a chair beside her and patted her hand with his long, pale fingers. "We are so anxious to cure you that we want to send you away to the country for a fortnight or so. Miss Peterson has come to help you to get ready, and I've kept my car waiting for you."

The moment had come at last. I knew at once what he meant and so did Mrs. Maradick. A wave of colour flowed and ebbed in her thin cheeks, and I felt her body quiver when I moved from the window and put my arms on her shoulders. I was aware again, as I had been aware that evening in Doctor Maradick's study, of a current of thought that beat from the air around into my brain. Though it cost me my career as a nurse and my reputation for sanity, I knew that I must obey that invisible warning.

"You are going to take me to an asylum," said Mrs. Maradick.

He made some foolish denial or evasion; but before he had finished I turned from Mrs. Maradick and faced him impulsively. In a nurse this was flagrant rebellion, and I realized that the act wrecked my professional future. Yet I did not care—I did not hesitate. Something stronger than I was driving me on.

"Doctor Brandon," I said, "I beg you—I implore you to wait until tomorrow. There are things I must tell you."

A queer look came into his face, and I understood, even in my excitement, that he was mentally deciding in which group he should place me—to which class of morbid manifestations I must belong.

"Very well, very well, we will hear everything," he replied soothingly; but I saw him glance at Miss Peterson, and she went over to the wardrobe for Mrs. Maradick's fur coat and hat.

Suddenly, without warning, Mrs. Maradick threw the shawls away from her and stood up. "If you send me away," she said, "I shall never live to come back."

The grey of twilight was just beginning, and while she stood there, in the dusk of the room, her face shone out as pale and flower-like as the daffodils on the window-

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sill. "I cannot go away!" she cried in a sharper voice. "I cannot go away from my child!"

I saw her face clearly; I heard her voice; and then—the horror of the scene sweeps back over me!—I saw the door open slowly and the little girl run across the room to her mother. I saw the child lift her little arms, and I saw the mother stoop and gather her to her bosom. So closely locked were they in that passionate embrace that their forms seemed to mingle in the gloom that enveloped them.

"After this can you doubt?" I threw out the words almost savagely—and then, when I turned from the mother and child to Doctor Brandon and Miss Peterson, I knew breathlessly—oh, there was a shock in the discovery!—that they were blind to the child. Their blank faces revealed the consternation of ignorance, not of conviction. They had seen nothing except the vacant arms of the mother and the swift, erratic gesture with which she stooped to embrace some invisible presence. Only my vision—and I have asked myself since if the power of sympathy enabled me to penetrate the web of material fact and see the spiritual form of the child—only my vision was not blinded by the clay through which I looked.

"After this can you doubt?" Doctor Brandon had flung my words back to me. Was it his fault, poor man, if life had granted him only the eyes of flesh? Was it his fault if he could see only half of the thing there before him?

But they couldn't see, and since they couldn't see I realized that it was useless to tell them. Within an hour they took Mrs. Maradick to the asylum; and she went quietly, though when the time came for parting from me she showed some faint trace of feeling. I remember that at the last, while we stood on the pavement, she lifted her black veil, which she wore for the child, and said: "Stay with her, Miss Randolph, as long as you can."

Then she got into the car and was driven off, while I stood looking after her with a sob in my throat. Dreadful as I felt it to be, I didn't, of course, realize the full horror of it, or I couldn't have stood there quietly on the pavement. I didn't realize it, indeed, until several months afterwards when word came that she had died in the asylum. I never knew what her illness was, though I vaguely recall that something was said about "heart failure"—a loose enough term. My own belief is that she

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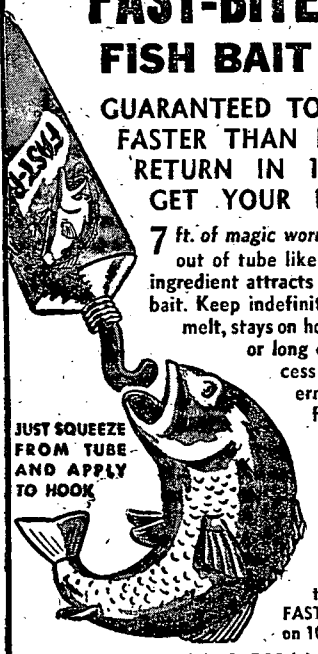

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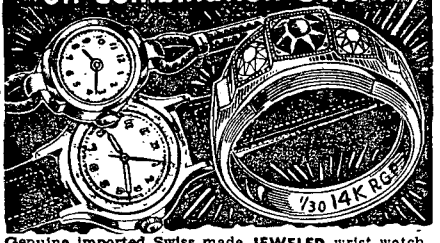

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died simply of a complete terror of life.

To my surprise Doctor Maradick asked me to stay on as his office nurse after his wife went to Rosedale; and when the news of her death came there was no suggestion of my leaving. I don't know to this day why he wanted me in the house. Perhaps he thought I should have less opportunity to gossip if I stayed under his roof; perhaps he still wished to test the power of his charm over me. His vanity was incredible in so great a man. I have seen him flush with pleasure when people turned to look at him in the street, and I know that he was not above playing on the sentimental weakness of his patients. But he was magnificent, heaven knows! Few men, I imagine, have been the objects of so many foolish infatuations.

THE next summer Doctor Maradick went abroad for two months, and while he was away I took my vacation in Virginia. When he came back the work was heavier than ever—his reputation by this time was tremendous—and my days were so crowded with appointments, and hurried flittings to emergency cases, that I had scarcely a minute left in which to remember poor Mrs. Maradick. Since the afternoon when she went to the asylum the child had not been in the house; and at last I was beginning to persuade myself that the little figure had been an optical illusion—the effect of shifting lights in the gloom of the old rooms—not the apparition I had once believed it to be.

It was in May that we heard of Mrs. Maradick's death, and exactly a year later, on a mild and fragrant afternoon, when the daffodils were blooming in patches around the old fountain in the garden, the housekeeper came into the office, where I lingered over some accounts, to bring me news of the doctor's approaching marriage.

"It is no more than we might have expected," she concluded rationally. "The house must be lonely for him—he is such a sociable man. But I can't help feeling," she brought out slowly after a pause in which I felt a shiver pass over me, "I can't help feeling that it is hard for that other woman to have all the money poor Mrs. Maradick's first husband left her."

"There is a great deal of money, then?" I asked curiously.

"A great deal." She waved her hand as if words were futile to express the sum. "Millions and millions!"

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"They will give up this house, of course?"

"That's done already, my dear. There won't be a brick left of it by this time next year. It's to be pulled down and an apartment-house built on the ground.

Again the shiver passed over me. I couldn't bear to think of Mrs. Maradick's old home falling to pieces.

"You didn't tell me the name of the bride," I said. "Is she someone he met while he was in Europe?"

"Dear me, no! She is the very lady he was engaged to before he married Mrs. Maradick, only she threw him over, so people said, because he wasn't rich enough. Then she married some lord or prince from over the water; but there was a divorce, and now she has turned again to her old lover. He is rich enough, now, I guess, even for her!"

It was all perfectly true, I suppose; it sounded as plausible as a story out of a newspaper; and yet while she told me I felt, or dreamed that I felt, a sinister, an impalpable hush in the air. I was nervous, no doubt; I was shaken by the suddenness with which the housekeeper had sprung her news on me; but as I sat there I had quite vividly an impression that the old house was listening—that there was a real, if invisible, presence somewhere in the room or the garden. Yet, when an instant afterwards I glanced through the long window which opened down to the brick terrace, I saw only the faint sunshine over the deserted garden, with its maze of box, its marble fountain, and its patches of daffodils.

The housekeeper had gone—one of the servants, I think, came for her—and I was sitting at my desk when the words of Mrs. Maradick on that last evening floated into my mind. The daffodils brought her back to me; for I thought, as I watched them growing, so still and golden in the sunshine, how she would have enjoyed them. Almost unconsciously I repeated the verse she had read to me:

"If thou hast two loaves of bread, sell one and buy daffodils"—and it was at this very instant, while the words were still on my lips, that I turned my eyes to the box maze, and saw the child skipping rope along the gravelled path to the fountain. Quite distinctly, as clear as day, I saw her come, with what children call the dancing step, between the low box borders to the place where the daffodils bloomed by the fountain. From her straight brown hair

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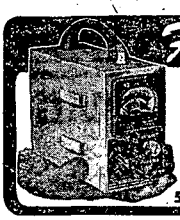
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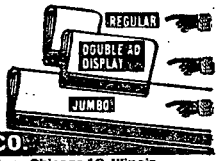

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to her frock of white dimity and her little feet, which twinkled in white socks and black slippers over the turning rope, she was as real to me as the ground on which she trod or the laughing marble boys under the splashing water.

Starting up from my chair, I made a single step to the terrace. If I could only reach her—only speak to her—I felt that I might at last solve the mystery. But with the first flutter of my dress on the terrace, the airy little form melted into the quiet dusk of the maze. Not a breath stirred the daffodils, not a shadow passed over the sparkling flow of the water; yet, weak and shaken in every nerve, I sat down on the brick step of the terrace and burst into tears. I must have known that something terrible would happen before they pulled down Mrs. Maradick's home.

The doctor dined out that night. He was with the lady he was going to marry, the housekeeper told me; and it must have been almost midnight when I heard him come in and go upstairs to his room. I was downstairs because I had been unable to sleep, and the book I wanted to finish I had left that afternoon in the office. The book—I can't remember what it was—had seemed to me very exciting when I began it in the morning; but after the visit of the child I found the romantic novel as dull as a treatise on nursing. It was impossible for me to follow the lines, and I was on the point of giving up and going to bed, when Doctor Maradick opened the front door with his latch-key and went up the staircase. "There can't be a bit of truth in it," I thought over and over again as I listened to his even step ascending the stairs. "There can't be a bit of truth in it." And yet, though I assured myself that "there couldn't be a bit of truth in it," I shrank, with a creepy sensation, from going through the house to my room in the third storey.

I was tired out after a hard day, and my nerves must have reacted morbidly to the silence and the darkness. For the first time in my life I knew what it was to be afraid of the unknown, of the unseen; and while I bent over my book, in the glare of the electric light, I became conscious presently that I was straining my senses for some sound in the spacious emptiness of the rooms overhead. The noise of a passing motor-car in the street jerked me back from the intense hush of expectancy; and I can recall the wave of relief that swept over me as I turned to my book again and

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tried to fix my distracted mind on its pages.

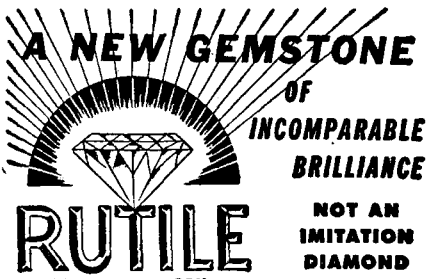
I WAS still sitting there when the telephone on my desk rang, with what seemed to my overwrought nerves a startling abruptness, and the voice of the superintendent told me hurriedly that Doctor Maradick was needed at the hospital. I had become so accustomed to these emergency calls in the night that I felt reassured when I had rung up the doctor in his room and had heard the hearty sound of his response. He had not yet undressed, he said, and would come down immediately while I ordered back his car, which must just have reached the garage.

"I'll be with you in five minutes!" he called as cheerfully as if I had summoned him to his wedding.

I heard him cross the floor of his room; and before he could reach the head of the staircase, I opened the door and went out into the hall in order that I might turn on the light and have his hat and coat waiting. The electric button was at the end of the hall, and as I moved towards it, guided by the glimmer that fell from the landing above, I lifted my eyes to the staircase, which climbed dimly, with its slender mahogany balustrade, as far as the third storey.

Then it was, at the very moment when the doctor, humming gaily, began his quick descent of the steps that I distinctly saw—I will swear to this on my death-bed—a child's skipping-rope lying loosely coiled, as it had dropped from a careless little hand, in the bend of the staircase. With a spring I had reached the electric button, flooding the hall with light; but as I did so, while my arm was still outstretched behind me, I heard the humming voice change to a cry of surprise or terror, and the figure on the staircase tripped heavily and stumbled with groping hands into emptiness. The scream of warning died in my throat while I watched him pitch forward down the long flight of stairs to the floor at my feet. Even before I bent over him, before I wiped the blood from his brow and felt for his silent heart, I knew that he was dead.

Something—it may have been, as the world believes, a misstep in the dimness, or it may have been, as I am ready to bear witness, an invisible judgment—something had killed him at the very moment when he most wanted to live.



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It is now possible for the average man or woman of modest circumstances to wear prestige jewelry. So realistic is RUTILE that it was found necessary to alert pawnbrokers who in the beginning here recently actually paid out on the basis of diamond values. PAWNBROKERS! ATTENTION! We suggest you order one to have to compare. Save yourself making costly mistakes, HUDSON GEM CO. sells only the cut stones. We do not sell mountings nor do we go in for costly catalogs, etc. We sell only in the ROUND and EMERALD cuts. ALL STONES FULLY FINISHED (expertly cut, polished, etc.). Thus, we can cut to the bone your cost on these wonderful stones. Have them set locally by your friendly jeweler in the mounting of your choice. Amateur lapidarists can make a nice business of buying cut stones from us and then setting and selling finished products. HUDSON GEM CO.'S RUTILE is the answer to the Mother-in-Law problem. For a few dollars every girl can sport a gem that only an experienced jeweler with loupe in his eye under excellent light can identify as not being a genuine diamond. Order by shape and number of carats from 1 carat to 5 carats. $10.00 per carat. Sent REGISTERED MAIL. Add 20% Fed. Tax. ABSOLUTE SATISFACTION GUARANTEED. WE WANT YOU TO TRY OUR PRODUCT. 30 DAY TRIAL. RETURN FOR 100% CASH REFUND. WRITE DEPARTMENT PF-5

HUDSON GEM CO., Hudson, N. Y.

False Teeth making you a Nervous Wreck?

NEW ELASTIC PLASTIC CUSHION

Dr. Day's DENTAL PLATE LINER

Just spread it on at night—wake up with a new, snug fit, better than new

New plastic plate tightener acts and wears like a rubber tire. Contains no rubber or chemicals—pure, odorless, tasteless, plastic. Elastic enough to give you comfort. Firm enough to hold your plates in place. One $2 tube lasts months. Just press it on at night—self adjusting. Wake up in the morning with a snug, comfortable fit.

FREE TRIAL—SEND NO MONEY. You get a full size $2 tube (postpaid) to try **BEFORE YOU PAY.** Just say you will try it for 7 days. And, if delighted, will send us $2. If not, you owe us nothing but a report on your results. You are the sole judge—no risk. Order now.

DAYLOR LABORATORIES, Dept. 26
551 S. Oxford, Los Angeles 5, Calif.

Try-before-you-pay offer tells you here is real help—more than words can say.

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Reducing Specialist Says:

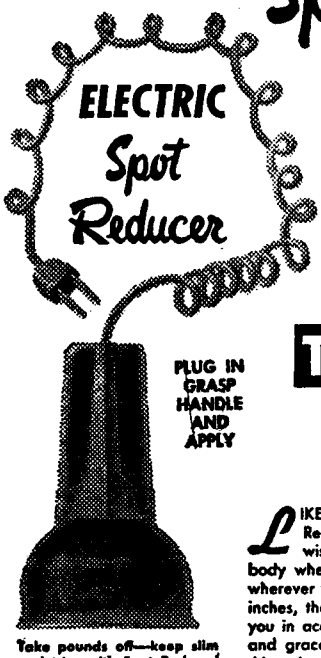
LOSE WEIGHT Where It Snows Most REDUCE MOST ANY PART OF THE BODY WITH

UNDERWRITERS LABORATORY APPROVED

Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing Penetrating Massage

FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use spot REDUCER with or without electricity—Also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.



PLUG IN GRASP HANDLE AND APPLY

Take pounds off—keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—MASSAGE!

TAKE OFF EXCESS WEIGHT!

Don't Stay FAT—You Can LOSE POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY Without Risking HEALTH

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercises or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

YOUR OWN PRIVATE MASSEUR AT HOME

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters Laboratory approved.

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only $1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman $8.95 plus delivery—or send $9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS

CAN'T SLEEP: Relax with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.

MUSCULAR ACHES: A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be aided by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

USED BY EXPERTS

Thousands have lost weight this way — in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. *The same method* used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY!

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

SPOT REDUCER CO., Dept. E-437
1025 Broad St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose $1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only $8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ SAVE POSTAGE—check here if you enclose $9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

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KLEIN'S — CHICAGO — SAVE BY MAIL!

SAVE 40%

9 mm Luger "LAHTI" $29.95

Gun Scoop of 1951! Acclaimed by all the Gun Editors of the famous outdoor magazines as a terrific Bargain at the nationally advertised price of $49.95, and Klein's, due to a sensational purchase, brings Sweden's finest Automatic Pistol to a few hundred lucky gun lovers at the ridiculously low price of $29.95, complete with a $15.00 Value brass fitted leather holster, extra clip, clip holder and cleaning tool.

READ WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY ABOUT THE GREAT SWEDISH HUSQVARNA "LAHTI" AUTOMATIC PISTOL

The American Rifleman: "The sample tested showed excellent accuracy and we think the 'Lahti' is an excellent value at $49.95." **Field & Stream:** "On the target range, the Remington 9 mm cartridge gave very light recoil, considering the punch at the hitting end. The 'Lahti' balances beautifully in the hand much like a Luger." **Hunting & Fishing:** "The 'Lahti' was exclusively a collector's item until a short time ago, and it was not unusual for a dealer to ask from $100.00 to $150.00 for a specimen in excellent condition." **W.H.B. Smith:** "Design uses a minimum of parts and a maximum of machining and is exceptionally strong." The "Lahti" is actually an improvement over the famous Luger. The "Lahti" is the finest gun made in Sweden's famous Husqvarna Arms Plant. Specifications: Model 1940, caliber 9 mm Luger. 4¾" Barrel, 9¼" overall, blued, 8 shot clip magazine, adjustable sights. Parts available.

Guaranteed a terrific $49.95 value, now exclusively at Klein's in Very Good Condition inside and out, at only **$29.95**

The "Lahti" in Excellent Condition ..... **$34.95** **The "Lahti" in Brand New Condition** **$39.95**

(Add $4.95 per box of 50—9mm Luger cartridges)

$16.00 AIR MATTRESS $8.95

Guaranteed durable rubberized closely woven. duck. 25" x 72" popular size. Factory repaired slight "seconds." Absolutely waterproof and airtight. Regularly $16.00. While they last, a terrific bargain at only $8.95

WADERS $5.95 SPECIAL PURCHASE

Stocking foot Waders; worn inside shoes, boots. 100% Waterproof, tough 12 Ga. Vinylite Olive Drab Plastic. State Size. Special $5.95.

Hooded Raincoat $3.99. Special Purchase. Extra long, full length slipover Fisherman's Rain Coat with Parka hood. Extends way below knees. Tough Vinylite Plastic. Not illus. Olive drab. State size. Only $3.99.

"MASTEREEL" AND GLASS SPINNING ROD

$40.25 Value! Both For $26.95

Save $13.30 on this outfit! "Supreme Quality" Famous Airex Bache Brown "Mastereel" (Reel alone is $23.75). Spinning Reel, plus the Horrocks-Ibbotson $16.50 Value, 5¾ ft., 2-piece SOLID GLASS SPINNING ROD. This Rod and Reel will handle lures from 1/6 oz. to ¾ oz. weight perfectly! Both for only ... $26.95 (Add $4.95 for an excellent assortment of spinning lures in a plastic box, plus an extra spool for the Mastereel, plus 100 yds. Nylon Spinning Line.)

SMITH & WESSON

KLEIN'S selection of new SMITH & WESSON Revolvers include: S&W K22, K38 in Combat Masterpiece 4" or 6" Target Models @ $71.50 each; 38/44 — 6½" "Outdoorsman" @ $84.75; 357 Magnum @ $110.00; 32 Hand Ejector @ $58.00; 38 Terrier @ $58.00; 32 or 38 Regulation Police @ $58.00; 38 Military and Police @ $62.00 (state barrel length wanted).

MARKSMAN AIR PISTOL $5.95

Looks and Feels like NEW U.S. Army .45 Auto. Accurate and Powerful. Shoots .177 caliber pellets, darts, and BB's. Generous supply included. Specially Priced $5.95

NEW HANDGUNS

Hi Standard Sport King 22 Automatic $44.00
Star 22 Auto. 7" Brl $49.75
Ranger 22 Auto 3 3/16" $39.75

RUGER 22 AUTO

$37.50

Brand New! For the shooter who must have the best! 10 shot 22 Long Rifle, 4¾" barrel, 8¾" overall, blued, Weight 36 oz. Perfect balance., amazingly accurate. STANDARD RUGER, BLUED $37.50
STANDARD RUGER, CHROME 45.00
"MARK I" TARGET RUGER, 6⅞" Barrel 57.50

$20.00 SOUTH BEND REEL AND GLASS ROD

Both For $10.95

Here's a rod and reel bargain you can't beat! The South Bend $10.00 Model 400 Level wind and anti-backlash Reel (1950 disc. model), PLUS the 1951 model H.I. "Admiral" solid glass fiber 3½, 4, 4½, 5, or 5½ ft. Casting Rod.

Both rod and reel are only $10.95

BROWNING 25 AUTO

$24.95

Sale! Tiny pocket 25 Automatic Pistol —only $24.95. Famous Belgian Browning Pre-War Pistol guaranteed in good shooting condition. Only 4½" long. Blued.

HOLSTER

New! For any handgun. Hand carved saddle leather. Describe gun exactly. $5.95.

COLT GUNS

KLEIN'S Selection of NEW Colt Guns include: Colt 38, 9 mm Luger, or 45 Automatic regular or light weight @ $65.00; Colt Conversion Unit @ $40.00; Colt 22 Automatics: Challenger @ $52.50; Woodsman Target @ $70.00; Woodsman Match Target @ $85.00; Official Police 38 Special @ $65.00; Detective Special 32 or 38 @ $65.00; 22 or 38 Officer's Model Target "Special" @ $75.00.

I. J. TARGET 22

$22.45

Brand New! Made by famous Iver Johnson, 8 shot, 22 short, Long or Long Rifle caliber cartridges, 6" barrel, blued, walnut grips. Amazing Value, only $22.45.

IVER JOHNSON SUPERSHOT SEALED 8

Brand New! Breakopen, 22 caliber, 8 shot, Target Model, 6" barrel. Only $37.75.

$27.00 GEP ROD AND SOUTH BEND REEL

Both For $17.95

The "GEP" $16 Value Model 380 PISTOL GRIP Actionized Solid Glass Fiber Casting Rod. STAINLESS STEEL GUIDES, selected cork patented "Gep" pistol grip, 5, 5½ or 6 ft. lengths, medium or light action (state choice). Plus the South Bend sturdy, lightweight, aluminum PERFECTORENO level wind and anti-backlash reel. Anodized, rich maroon aluminum—weighs only 6 oz. Phosphor bronze bearings and bushings. Has famous Perfectoreno spool control mechanism, capacity 100 yds. 18 lb. line (New 1950 disc. model #760—$11.00 value). Both Rod and Reel, only $17.95

H & R 922

$27.25

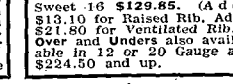
Brand New! 9 shot, 22 caliber, shoots all lengths of 22 cartridges, regular or high speed. 1951 Model has many new features. State choice 2½", 4" or 6" barrel, blued. Low, low price, only ... $27.25
Chrome Plated Finish, Only $29.25

SCHIMEL 22 PISTOL

$20.00

Brand New! Best selling CO_2 (Carbon Dioxide Gas) Pistol. 22 caliber, powered by cheap CO_2 Cylinder obtainable everywhere. Complete with a good big supply of extra CO_2 cylinders and 22 caliber lead pellets. Write for FREE Schimel literature.
Postpaid, $20.00 complete

BROWNING SHOTGUNS

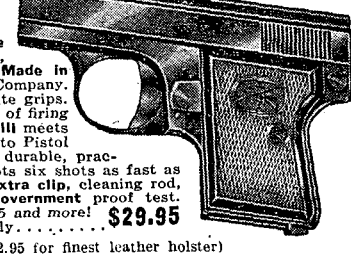


Brand New! Klein's selection of Belgian Browning Automatic Shotguns is America's largest! Get yours early! 12 or 16 Gauge, Standard $119.90. Lt. 12 or Sweet 16 $129.85. (Add $13.10 for Raised Rib, Add $21.80 for Ventilated Rib.) Over and Unders also available in 12 or 20 Gauge at $224.50 and up.

SCOOP! $39.95 BERNARDELLI $29.95

TINY 25 CAL. AUTOMATIC PISTOL

Given! Extra clip, cleaning rod and oiler with every gun.



Brand new! Six shot. Blued finish. **Double safety.** Vest pocket size, 4⅛" long overall, height 2½", 2" barrel, weight 9 oz. **Made in Italy** by the famous **Bernardelli** Arms Company. **Parts available.** Diamond checkered bakelite grips. Simple button release permits easy removal of firing pin assembly. This powerful little **Bernardelli** meets the demand for a 25 caliber (6.35mm) Auto Pistol of slight weight and very small size, yet durable, practical, easy and efficient in operation. Shoots six shots as fast as you can pull the trigger. Complete with **extra clip**, cleaning rod, oiler and certificate of **Official Italian Government** proof test. The Bernardelli sells everywhere for $39.95 and more! Leave it to **Klein's** to bring it to you for only **$29.95**

(Add $2.95 per box of 50 cartridges) (Add $2.95 for finest leather holster)

KLEIN'S SPORTING GOODS, INC.
Dept. 3, 227 West Washington St.
Chicago 6, Ill.

Please rush me .....
100% Satisfaction Guaranteed or Your Money Back.
Enclosed is $..... ☐ In full Payment ☐ 20% Deposit, balance to be paid C. O. D. on delivery.
Write complete address on Separate Sheet.

Firearms Purchasers Sign: "I am not an alien and I have never been convicted of a crime of violence, nor am I under indictment or a fugitive from justice."

Signed .....
Occupation ..... Age .....

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THIS 5 ROOM ALADDIN READI-CUT HOUSE $1642 FREIGHT PAID

SAVE 4 PROFITS ON LUMBER, MILLWORK, HARDWARE & LABOR

The Aladdin Readi-Cut System of Construction enables you to save 18% lumber waste and up to 30% labor costs, and guarantees you will receive the highest quality dry lumber and a COMPLETE house as specified. You can buy your **COMPLETE HOUSE, ALL IN ONE SHIPMENT,** direct from our mills and save the in-between profits.

HOW TO BEAT THE HIGH COST OF BUILDING

Every hour you can put in on the construction of your Aladdin home means a saving to you of from $2.00 to $3.00 per hour on its cost. That means a SAVING of from $15.00 to $18.00 for every day you work on it!. . . Depending on the size of the house, the carpenter work sums up to from three hundred hours to twelve hundred hours. . . . WITH MOST OF THE SKILLED LABOR ALREADY PERFORMED when you receive your Aladdin Readi-Cut, what an opportunity you have to bring down the cost of your new home to practically a pre-war level. Our drawings and instructions cover everything from the foundation up, so you can save any part, or even all labor costs.

BUILD IT YOURSELF AND PAY YOURSELF THOSE HIGH WAGES

ALADDIN HOUSES ARE NOT PREFABRICATED

THERE'S AN ALADDIN HOME NEAR YOU— WRITE US

WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU BUY AN ALADDIN HOUSE

You get ALL THE LUMBER cut to fit by fast machinery-production line methods—marked and numbered, ready to erect practically without the use of a saw; also siding, flooring, interior trim, all millwork, doors, windows, mouldings, glass, hardware, nails, roofing, paint and complete drawings with instructions. Many Aladdin home buyers erect their own houses.

Send 25 CENTS today for New 1951 4-Color Catalog No. LM-20

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THE ALADDIN CO.

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45 YEARS MANUFACTURING ALADDIN HOUSES

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